

# Painless, Pointless, Profitless Preaching

by 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, "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."

The patient asks, "Treatment for what, Doc?" "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?"

"Do I detect that you are beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable about your-self? 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 Doctor Is The Preacher**

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 we can help 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." 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, hard-ships 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 a 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 is 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 who 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 like-wise 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 is time that 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 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 rather than painless.

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