

Preaching the "Noes"

by Lee Moses

The story is told of a congregation that had long been known for teaching the truth. However, this congregation got a new preacher, and within a couple of years had descended into total and fatal error. The previous preacher had been there for three decades, and the faithful respected him for preaching nothing but the truth. Everybody wondered, "What happened?", "How did this happen?" One person, who knew the congregation well, explained it this way: "The previous preacher told them the truth all those years. What he didn't tell them was what wasn't the truth." By not being warned against specific error, the congregation was left an essentially untaught congregation, and an easy target for a change agent seeking to take over a church.

This story has unfortunately been repeated countless times with slight variations. Elders have demanded the truth be taught from their pulpits, at the same time telling preachers, "Don't preach against that error—it's not a problem here." So when that problem finally arrives, no one is prepared for it. "Conservative" congregations are too often what one writer described, "Conservative in an ignorant, non-polemic, sweetness-and-light kind of way, which is just meat for the wolves."

"No" is not a very popular thing to say, and not a pleasant thing to hear. In today's pluralistic "no one way is better than another" mind-set, even people who nod their head aggressively to the firm "yeses" of the Gospel cringe whenever they hear the "noes."

The negative plays a crucial role in preaching. Two-thirds of the Lord's commission to Jeremiah was negative (Jer. 1:10). Gospel preachers are charged to "reprove, rebuke, exhort," again, two-thirds negative (2 Tim. 4:2). Faithful Gospel preachers preach the "noes."

A common compliment given preachers is, "I've never heard him preach error." But has he addressed the marriage, divorce, and remarriage issues that ensnare so many brethren today? Has he preached against "social" drinking and immodest attire? Has he preached against liberalism? Has he addressed any of the fellowship issues the church faces today?

One cannot preach the truth without preaching against error. One cannot live

righteously without being warned against sin. A congregation cannot long remain faithful without deliberately avoiding the missteps of the faithless.

Let us never be afraid or ashamed to preach God's "noes."