**THE AIM AND IMPACT OF PREACHING**

“The task of the preacher,” once quipped Vance Havner, “is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.” Commentator Dale Ralph Davis expressed it this way: “There is always this tension in the word of God, and any authentic messenger of that word knows and lives in it. If a preacher, for example, never places you under the criticism of God’s word, never tells you your sin but only smothers you with comfort, you must wonder if he is phony.” However, Davis adds, “If his preaching contains only the judgment note and seldom offers comfort and encouragement, one must ask if actually cares for God’s people. If one has a high regard both for the truth of God (even if it’s judgment) and for the troubles of the church, he will retain the proper tension in the biblical word; he will both afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.”

The apostle Paul was such a preacher who knew about to walk the tension of that spiritual tightrope in his ministry. In our Bible reading yesterday from 2 Corinthians 7 we learn several things about the role of the preacher, his attitude and the positive changes that can result from the faithful proclamation of the Word.

**(1) There are times when rebuke is necessary.** Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was not easy for him. It pained him. But it was necessary. In the church there was division. Exaltation of men. Sexual immorality. Marriage problems. Desecration of the Lord’s Supper. Abuse of spiritual gifts, accompanied by jealousy and infighting. Disorder in the assembly. And misunderstandings about the bodily resurrection.

Gospel preaching cannot overlook sin in the church. Or gloss it over. Or justify it. It must be addressed. Specified. Condemned. And instructions given to correct it. This is what Paul did. This is what we must do today. Paul instruction to Timothy regarding preaching is still applicable – “reprove, rebuke and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

**(2) We should take no pleasure in rebuking others.** There is a sense Paul felt “regret” that he needed to write such a stinging rebuke. Pointing out their sins, and condemning their wayward lives brought Paul no joy or happiness. But it was necessary. I’m reminded of the lady who complained to the elders about a preacher’s sermon on Hell. “What?” they asked, “Don’t you believe in Hell?” “Yes,” she replied, “But he shouldn’t act like he’s glad I’m going there.”

Attitude is everything in preaching the Truth. It must be done in love. Paul loved the Corinthians. Cared about them. And wanted them to be right with God. So, he did the uncomfortable thing and brought them face to face with their sins and shortcomings.

**(3) Paul’s goal in rebuking them was to produce change.** The apostle’s aim was not to beat them up but to lift them up. Not to hurt them, but to help them. Not to discourage them, but to encourage them. Not just to eradicate the evil among them, but to generate good works and spiritual growth.

Preachers today need the same heart, spirit, and attitude. When we truly care for the souls of others, we want their best. We desire the salvation of their souls. We want to foster positive change that enhances their relationship with the Lord.

**(4) Gospel preaching can produce the joy of repentance.** To the Corinthians credit, they took Paul’s inspired rebuke to heart. They were truly sorry for their sins. Not a carnal sense, of being sorry they were caught or called out, but in a godly sense that produced repentance. Not only did the Corinthians experience the joy of reconciliation, but Paul was able to rejoice in their repentance. And Titus was also encouraged by their obedience.

Speaking the truth in love is always the right thing to do. People may not always change, but when they do it makes ministry enjoyable and spiritually satisfying.

Preachers, let’s not be afraid of challenging people to change. As Francis de Sales put it, “The test of a preacher is that his congregation goes away saying not, ‘What a lovely sermon,’ but, ‘I will do something!’”

–Ken Weliever, via thepreachersword.com