

BLAME THE PREACHER!

By Keith Greer

"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."
(Philippians 2:4)

While this passage in Philippians is written to Christians, not just preachers, one lesson that a gospel preacher should never forget is that his interests are for the "whole flock", not just a few of the members.

When I decided to pursue preaching the gospel, I turned to other gospel preachers for advice and answers to my questions. One answer was similar from every preacher that I talked to. "**Just remember, you are never going to make everybody happy.**" Believe me, that statement is indeed true!

Since beginning "full-time" preaching, I have also received many other "suggestions" from brethren. I have listened and pondered all of the statements that have been made to me because I want to develop into a better and more effective gospel preacher. Every preacher needs to listen to any criticism he receives. Why? Sometimes we can hear things that will improve our efforts to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. Over the years some folks advice has proven to be very beneficial in my development as a preacher. Here is a sampling of some of the comments that have been made personally to me since I began full-time preaching:

1. "You need to be more 'entertaining' in your preaching."
2. "Any preacher that preaches longer than 25 minutes is just speaking to be hear himself. If he speaks longer, he loses his audience."
3. "Preach positive and encouraging lessons. We need to be uplifted, not corrected."
4. "You should never preach on 'controversial' subjects until you have had more experience in these matters."
5. "Your lesson was excellent. My only complaint is that you used too many scriptures."
6. "You take too 'hard' of a stand. A preacher needs to be more 'open-minded' to other positions. "
7. "You are too confrontational. To be effective, you must 'softly' approach subjects, each time hitting just a little harder."
8. "Your preaching is dividing the church and stirring up trouble."
9. "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

When the apostle Paul spoke to the elders at Ephesus, he reminded them concerning the work he had done while he was with them: "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone

preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. " {Acts 20:25-27} Please note that he had preached the things concerning the kingdom of God. Paul added he withheld nothing from them that was contained in God's word – he sought to preach it all. Could we then conclude that if a subject is found in God's word then it needs to be preached? He later went on to give "sound" advice to a young preacher named Timothy. "Preach the word; be instant In season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine ... But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." {2 Timothy 4:2-5} I have to look to the scriptures for my guidance because, ultimately, my responsibility is to God.

If a gospel preacher is going to please God, he must, of necessity, preach "the whole counsel of God". In doing so, there will be "controversial" , "rebuking" and "correcting" lessons. What brethren should ask themselves when they hear something they don't like is, "Why is he preaching on these subjects"? How does a preacher decide what to "preach on"? I can't speak for others, but there are various ways that I decide what I should preach.

* I try to listen to answers that are given in Bible classes. Sometimes a lack of knowledge in a particular area can be very apparent during a Bible study.

*. Many of my topics have come as a result of the personal Bible studies that are held outside of the regular Bible classes.

*. Another source of information is why people are falling away. If a problem area is discovered, some sound teaching is needed.

*. Sometimes various members will ask to have a lesson on a specific subject.

*. By reading publications from other sources, we can prepare lessons and make application concerning issues that are arising in other places. Personally speaking, I'm a firm believer in "preventive preaching." One finds it much easier to preach on a subject before it become a problem in the local church. When we try to preach on a problem, "after the fact," I found it more difficult to deal with the issue. Undoing a false teaching is much harder than having it never arise!

*. Getting to know the members of the local church also helps in understanding the strengths and weaknesses found in its members.

*. I read many articles and sermons printed on the internet. Sometimes a particular subject or series will catch my eye. Many times I will take that information, make my own outline and work up a Power Point presentation on that subject, using some of the slides of others and adding my own. Generally speaking, most power point presentations from other sources on the web come with no outline. Fine, then I can make my own, add or subtract from the information I gained and change the presentation to fit what I want to convey in the lesson. Why reinvent the wheel?

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome, "So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." {Romans 1:15,16} Paul's message was not always "popular with the audience" and at times he suffered greatly for the cause of Christ. "Are they ministers of Christ? --I speak as a fool--I am more: in labors more abundant, in

stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” {2 Corinthians 11:23-26}

Why did he do it? The desire to please God in his preaching and the love for lost souls. Refusing to preach what a person needs to hear demonstrates no love for that lost soul. Preaching is a wonderful work and seeking to save souls with the most powerful message is an honor and privilege. Every preacher knows the power is in the message – not in him! ***