

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

MY PREACHING

As a preacher, there are always those who want to tell me what kind of preaching that I need to do. I do not necessarily mind suggestions or criticisms. I welcome guidance from those who are wise (elders, those mature in the faith, and so on). The only way I can confidently assess my preaching (striking the proper balance) is by comparing it to the sermons of the master teacher—Jesus Christ.

Some attack negative preaching and teaching! What does this mean? Does that mean forbidding certain things, condemning particular actions, and exposing sin and error? If so, then these who attack such teaching need to get rid of most of the Bible! The Bible is full of negative charges.

The Preacher's Duty

What is the preacher's charge? What is his duty? Paul addresses this very issue with a preacher named Timothy:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (II Timothy 4:1-3a).

The standard of preaching is *"the word"* (the gospel, the truth, the faith, and so on). The duty of the preacher is to preach God's saving truth continually. Exhortation must be given, but also there is the need for reproof and rebuking!

When I assess my own preaching, I use Jesus Christ and his word as my standard. The proper idea of a preaching must come from the Prince of all Preachers, Jesus Christ. When I examine his sermons I learn about the kind of preaching which is needed. Take for instance "The Sermon on the Mount." We find a sermon full of negative preaching! Oh yes, it has many positive things, but Jesus corrects many false ideas and practices.

When Someone Complains

When someone begins to complain about my sermons, I first examine my own attitude. Have I preached God's word with a loving disposition (Ephesians 4:15)? Do I have a love for God and for my audience? Paul told the young preacher, Timothy, to examine himself: *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee"* (I Timothy 4:16). (See also II Corinthians 13:5).

I next inform them of my intention to pattern my preaching after the sermons in the Bible. I have an obligation as a preacher of the gospel to preach all the council of God (Acts 20:26-27). Yes, I know that I could preach many sermons without specifically propagating any error, but this is not what God requires of a herald of his word. I must at times deal with controversial subjects, expose error, and rebuke sinners. I do not gain pleasure from this, except the pleasure of obeying God's commandments. Thus, I am led to a challenge for those who oppose my preaching. I request to be shown how my sermons are different than the ones in the New Testament. I do not claim perfection; I am a man of clay just like everyone else. I can be wrong. However, I want to be shown from the Bible. How do the things I say compare with the ingredients of the Lord's sermons? How do they relate to what Paul preached? Not that I presume to compare myself with the Lord or Paul, but they are my examples in preaching. They are my goal! Just as they are my examples in living the Christian life (I Peter 2:21; I Corinthians 11:1).

Preaching to Please God

As a preacher of the gospel, I feel privileged to stand before any audience and deliver God's word. It is my humble prayer to do it without fear or favor. It is my sincere intention to preach out of love for the truth, for God, and for the souls of mankind. It is my prayer that God may help me in being the kind of preacher which pleases him.

Again, Paul told Timothy, *"If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things,*

THE GLORY OF GOD—THE GIFT TO MAN

Text: _____

I. In the Church is _____

Notes:

II. In the Church is _____

Notes:

III. In the Church is _____

Notes:

IV. In the Church is _____

Notes:

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Text: _____

I. The _____ of God’s Righteousness

Notes:

II. The _____ of God’s Righteousness

Notes:

III. The _____ of God’s Righteousness

Notes:

thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (I Timothy 4:6)

-Tracy Dugger

WHEN THE SKUNK GOT UNDER THE CHURCH

A sister in one congregation related an amazing story to my wife. It seems that a skunk (or two?) got into the crawl space under the church building. An exterminator was called, and he promptly killed the skunk. The problem was, he left it there. When everyone showed up for mid-week services, the smell was so overpowering that everyone got nauseated. The smell remained on their clothing even after they returned home. It sounds humorous, but it must have been a real ordeal!

I wonder how many skunks get under churches. They perch under them and really make themselves known. They leave such an effect that it is often carried away from the church building upon the hearts, thoughts, and feelings of church members.

PRIDE is a skunk that gets under churches. Is anything more offensive than self-centered egotism? It keeps people from admitting their mistakes. It causes prejudice and haughtiness. God hates pride (Proverbs 8:13). Pride produces dishonor (Proverbs 11:2), strife (Proverbs 13:10), and destruction (Proverbs 16:18). Pride is a skunk!

GOSSIP is a skunk that gets under churches. It is halitosis of the heart. Every word that comes off the tongue of a gossip is foul! God hates it, and it ruins good churches (Proverbs 11:13). I imagine it runs people off, too!

PETTINESS is a skunk that gets under churches. Bickering and arguing over the smallest matters is an embarrassment to faithful Christians, a black eye for the church’s reputation, and a rank reminder that a spiritual skunk is perched beneath the surface. Biting and devouring is a dangerous business (Galatians 5:15).

LUKEWARMNESS is a skunk that gets under churches. The wishy-washy, uncommitted spirit of the Laodiceans nauseated God (Revelation 3:16). When a church just comes to keep house and is not involved, what a stench the church becomes to the community. A ho-hum attitude is a skunk that gets under churches.

When need to exterminate the skunks by removing them from the church and ridding ourselves of all attitudes and actions inconsistent with the will of Christ. We are to draw all men to Christ (cf. John 12:32; Daniel 12:2) rather than repel lost sinners or other brethren (cf. Acts 13:8). What kind of impression are you leaving on others? Babylon of old was in trouble; consequently, God said, *“Its stench shall come up, and its ill savor shall come up”* (Joel 2:20). May we learn from them, deciding instead to send up to heaven, and out toward others, *“the savor of his knowledge in every place”* (II Corinthians 2:14).

-Neal Pollard

THE BOOK OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The book of Romans was (and is) a landmark work for the advancement of Christianity in the first century as well as today. Its general purpose is to provide man with the means by which he might be made righteous and to make known the origin of righteousness, the righteous God. Likewise, though, does the book of Romans handle issues that in many ways was considered taboo in the first century, and consequently is a great tool in handling issues that many still find to be taboo in the religious world.

Much about the background and overview of the book can be found in the prologue of the book (Romans 1:1-7).

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God. (which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,) concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead; by whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name: among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

First, the writer identifies himself as Paul, the apostle and servant of Jesus Christ. This is the first of at least thirteen books attributed to Paul in the New Testament. It is believed to have been written from Corinth in the midst of his third missionary journey, around A.D. 57-58. Interesting, then, is the fact that as of yet Paul had had no personal contact with those to whom he is writing. He would not make it to Rome for another few years, but having heard of the brethren meeting in Rome went about to contact them through this correspondence.

Second, Paul identifies the theme he will be addressing, namely Jesus Christ and His power. Salvation, the product of righteousness, is also the product of a great power (II Corinthians 13:4). In fact, Dunn states that, “To the world-ruling Romans, he describes Christianity as the power of God, which by the word of God, the sword of the Spirit, conquers all nations.” That power is pictured in His great victory over the grave, whereby He is able to give man hope in the final resurrection.

Third, the topic of race relations is briefly mentioned, only to set the stage for the great discussion that will eventually come throughout Romans 6-11. It had been almost twenty years, by this time, since Cornelius and his household were first preached the gospel as Gentiles and became obedient to the faith. Still, though, were their inhibitions in the minds of many regarding their equality with the Jews socially or spiritually. Thus Paul briefly deals with that topic here and then goes into more detail in later chapters.

Fourth, the recipients of the letter are identified as New Testament Christians. Given, then, the many topics Paul discusses in the book it appears to be the case that he is attempting to set forth a correct view of Christianity. Perhaps there were still remnants of heathenism and Judaism inflicting the purity of the church. Paul thus writes to clear up any confusion and correct any inaccuracies plaguing the brethren.

And, fifth, the location of these believers to whom Paul writes is identified as Rome. At this time Rome was the capital of the world. Since she had conquered Greece in 63 B.C., she had ruled the world with a fist of iron. Even as Paul writes, Rome is committing atrocities against Christianity in the name of power. Thus, Paul is “stepping into the lions den” hoping to advance Christianity by starting at the root of its current persecution, Rome.

Through the rest of the book, Paul touches various themes that contextually “hit the nail on the head” regarding issues of the day. But also by application is there great truth in everything that was written.

“Paul’s purpose in Romans is to present a systematic explanation of the gospel (Chapters 1-6); to justify preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews (Chapter 3:8-30); to give the clearest and fullest exposition of the doctrines of sin and of grace (3:8; 5:20-21; 6:1-2); to give the divine solution to the universal dominion of sin and death in the universal redemption through Christ (5:12-21); to overcome the bias of Jewish and Gentile brethren toward one another (2:1; 6:11; 14:3); and to instruct Christians in many practical duties (Chapters 12-26)” (Dunn).

The book of Romans, thus, is seen as a marvelous mixture of historic problems and contemporary solutions. Its teachings on grace and its role in our salvation deepens the appreciation one has for their salvation. Each verse is a precious gem all should hold dear and appreciate for its value.

-Andy Brewer