

The Servant



Newsletter for under-shepherds and other Servants of God /5523 Newberry Drive/Raleigh, NC 27609

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The purpose of this newsletter is to pass along information and ideas to help the Lord's servants as they minister to others. Feel free to use any of it in your ministry

The pulpit

“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:” Nehemiah 8:5

Just as the family altar is a spiritual thing and not a piece of furniture, so too the pulpit is a sacred place. It is not the lectern, nor the limelight that makes preaching special. What happens in this sacred place cannot be learned at Toast Masters, nor in colleges or seminaries. Every man should no more be expected to preach than every woman be expected to play the piano. And if someone feels called to play the piano, let him practice his scales in private. Preaching is a sacred and holy thing.

Ezra was “above all the people.” Those who see only with carnal vision misunderstand the ministry of preaching. They do not understand Ezra. Let them find and read the text *“Unto whom much is given, of him shall be much required”* (Lk. 12:48). I'm afraid that in some places not much is required of those who would want to preach. Some see the preacher as elevated above all others because he is on a platform. Some see Ezra “up there” and do not know what he is doing. Some see the pulpit as an opportunity to be center stage. It needs to be guarded from those who want to stand out. Some see the pulpit as a “bully pulpit” where they may voice their opinions or grievances.

The platform was not for Ezra. *“And Ezra the scribe stood upon the pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose”* (8:4). The elevation was not for Ezra, it was for the Book. *“And they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book...”* (8:1).

It is not the table upon which we set the elements that is sacred, nor is it the elements themselves. They are a symbol of something greater. What is sacred is the memory of the incarnate Word who became flesh and died for us. There is something else very special in the assembly. It is breaking the bread of life, preaching the word. This too is a sacred and holy thing.

It is not for us to judge another man's servants, yet I feel compelled to remind those in Oversight what a sacred calling is theirs and what they are overseeing. God has entrusted them with the care and feeding of the sheep. And if this is so, let them be careful that they do not trample on the very holy ground from which they hope God's lambs should feed. “Feed the flock of God.” (1Pet. 5:2). □

Sometimes

Sometimes when I read I think I hear thunder
and know I have tread upon God's holy ground
Sometimes when I read I am left there to wonder
As I think of God's love and the grace I have found

Sometimes when I read I am prone then to weeping
At the sight of my sin and my Lord on the cross
Sometimes I am tempted to dance and to leaping
when I feel my forgiveness, see the chains I have lost

Sometimes when I read I'm content as a baby
at rest at the bosom of a mother's love caring
Sometimes not what is, but those things which may
be
I'm stirred in my spirit my faith rises daring

It's quick and it's powerful, sharp as a sword
it pierces my spirit, this Word of the Lord
the joints and the marrow, the thoughts of my heart
Word inspired, incarnate, what a wonder thou art.

ID

Sins in the Pulpit

“Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2Tim 2:15

Sin comes in many forms and sizes. There are sins that are obvious and open, then there are sins that only we and God know about. As men called to the high-calling of proclaiming God’s word we need to be careful of not “walking worthy of the vocation” to which we are called. A high calling demands a high standard. The following are sins sometimes found in the pulpit. Let a preacher beware of:

Ignorance- “study” The KJV says “study” the Gk says “*spudazo*” which means to make every effort. Some translations say “be diligent.” How much effort went into that last lesson, sermon or message? Did you make every effort to both gather the harvest and glean from God’s fields? Did you grasp as much as you could possibly carry away? There is too much for a single harvest. Some, out of ignorance fail to recognize the ripest fruit. A cannon without a missile, a tailor without a thread, a carpenter without a tool, a sower without a seed, a fisher without a net or boat, such is the preacher who has not studied and made every effort to bring the essence and the fullness of God’s Word through careful study.

Arrogance- “thyself” We all are called to show ourselves approved, not to show ourselves. Preaching is a high calling, but it is best done by the humble. Let a man not think more highly of himself than he ought. Better yet, let a man not think of himself at all. The “gift of gab” is a poor substitute for the “gift of God.” A life-changing and ministry-changing verse for many preachers would be John 3:30 “He must increase and I must decrease.” Some men would be much better preachers if they stopped talking about themselves (their last vacation, or last trip to the holy land) and spoke more about Jesus. Arrogance is an “offensive sense of superiority.” Nothing will stop God from working quicker than pride. Beware of the sin of arrogance. It is found in “self.”

Incompleteness- There is something missing in some sermons. The words sound “all-

right,” but something is wrong somewhere. Some lessons, like Saul’s armor, have not been tested and proved yet. Paul speaks of the preacher’s work being “approved.” A brick mason must make his wall square. The mortar must be mixed right and laid down evenly with each brick placed with precision. “Approved.” is “*dokimos*” in the ancient tongue and it means “genuine” or “tried and true.” A product must be tested before it is put in the market place. Sometimes preaching rings untrue because it is not preached out of experience. Without calling attention to himself, the preacher that rings most true is one who seems to have been there. Before a truth is ready to be proclaimed we must “know it,” experience and live the text. A preacher may never actually travel to the holy land, but we can soon tell if he has been to Calvary.

Irreverence- “unto God” All we do, we do unto God. The preacher’s job is not to entertain or please men. God is not joyless or against laughter. Some sour saints need to “lighten up” a little, as they say. At the same time, it should be remembered that the House of God is a house of prayer and not a comedy club. Humor has its place, and laughter can be like a good medicine, but beware of too much irreverent chatter. If a child asks for bread will you give him a stone? Winnow your thoughts in prayer. Separate the chaff from the wheat before you enter the pulpit. Some things are sacred.

Indolence- Paul calls the minister a “workmen” or a “laborer.” Good preaching is work. It is hard work. Would a farmer expect a harvest if he never worked his fields? No, he rises before the sun and toils until dark. He must till, and disk, and fertilize. He does all he can and then he leaves the rest to God. A true preacher has taken a vow akin to that of the apostles in Acts 6:4 “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and the ministry of the word.”

Incompetence- “that needeth not to be ashamed.” When the preacher has risen early and labored in prayer and the word, when he has watched a text grow from a blade, to a stalk, and then an ear, when he has searched for, found and made the application first in his own life; only then is he ready to share the harvest with others, and needs to make no apology for his efforts. But if he serves up

empty plates to hungry and hurting people, he should (I repeat, should) be ashamed.

Imbalance- “rightly dividing the word of truth” A field that only knows cotton is soon exhausted. A good farmer rotates his crops. What barely gives, corn borrows. Cotton planted year after year in the same soil will kill the ground. Greed, on the other hand, plants poppies. Opium may make some people feel better and keep some men in business, but such a harvest shall not truly be reaped but in hell. Philosophy and psychology is the opium of homiletics. The harvest of such ministries is one of husks. “Rightly dividing” means cutting straight. Paul, the tent-maker knew the importance of getting his edges straight if he had any hope of making his seams sure. The good preacher can clearly separate law from grace without destroying either. His steadiness is clear and his preaching balanced.

Not every man is a preacher. Every man is called to preach Christ, but every man is not a preacher. Every man is called to tell the next person they can about their Savior, but that is different than a sermon. Some are called and gifted. No one given a gift can boast. It is a gift. The priesthood of the believer has nothing, absolutely nothing to do with preaching. It has to do with being able to come before God without a human mediator. Don’t confuse the Mediator with the minister. One is the Savior, the other is just a servant.



Good Preaching

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” 1Cor. 14:3

1. Builds up
2. Bears up
3. Binds up



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