

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

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THE CHURCH STILL STANDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Don Walker

When Christ promised to build His church, He promised it would be built upon the rock—Peter’s confession, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:13). The church is built upon the solidarity of the Deity and perfection of Jesus Christ. She is a most glorious church because of her relationship with Christ.

The value of the church is seen in the fact that Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). And it is always true that heaven is involved when it comes to the church, for she is in the mind of God even from the beginning of the world and exists as the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:9-11). Holding such a lofty position brings with it a grave responsibility. The church must reflect the same standard of excellence that is associated with our God. The church must stand for excellence.

The apostle Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:9-10). With Paul’s statement in mind, let us turn our attention to The Church Still Stands For Excellence.

Paul’s prayer for the Philippians expressed what may be the most important point of this article. As a people of love, we dare not jettison “knowledge and judgment.” If we do then we will be ill prepared to recognize, much less approve, those things that are excellent. The charge, “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21), demands an ability to recognize and discern. The Hebrew writer addressed this very problem.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

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FROM THE EDITOR:

THE WISDOM TO SEE THE END

Cody Westbrook

Every parent works hard to instill within their children the ability to contemplate the outcomes of their words and actions, but such an effort is not always easy. A father tells his little boy to clean up his toys, tell the truth, and follow the rules but often the little boy just wants to know “why?” Parents have something that their children do not—life experience, and with it, wisdom, and foresight. A child may not understand why Mom and Dad have certain rules, but Mom and Dad know that the foundation for good moral and ethical behavior is laid in childhood. A teenager may think his parents are the worst for not allowing him to be out as late as he wants or date whomever he wants, but parents want what is best for their children and possess a kind of wisdom that allows them to see the outcome of an action that their teenager cannot. Often, a parent’s wish is simply that their children might step into their shoes and see things from their perspective. We want our children to see the end result of their actions.

Similarly, the book of Deuteronomy may be viewed as the Father’s final exhortation to a son coming of age. The generation of Israelites to exit Egypt had died in the wilderness and a new generation was now ready to stand in their shoes and cross the Jordan into the Promised Land. Deuteronomy stands as a final exhortation to prepare them for that undertaking. The final stanza of the book is a song which Jehovah gave to Moses, who wrote it and taught it to Israel (Deu. 31:22). The song was to be a permanent witness to the requirements of the covenant and penalty for violating it. Like the historical Psalms, the children of Israel were to sing this song throughout their generations that they may be reminded of the lessons of the past and their responsibilities in the present and future. Embedded within this song is the same desire discussed previously—the desire of a Father for His children to contemplate the consequences of their actions— “O that they were wise,

that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end” (Deu. 32:29)!

A study of God’s desire in Deuteronomy 32:29 begins by recognizing Israel’s inability to accomplish it. Though Jehovah wanted them to consider the consequences of their actions they could not because “they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them” (Deu. 32:28). To be “void of counsel” is to lack sense and to have no “understanding” is to have an inability to understand basic truth. In other words, they were senseless! They lacked wisdom and discernment regarding their actions. Famine, destruction, and the sword had all come upon them because of their sinfulness and yet they lacked the wherewithal to recognize that such judgments had come upon them due to their own actions. Jeremiah would say many years later,

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed: All that honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: Yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward. Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; Therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter (Lam. 1:8-9).

How tragic that even their enemies could see what they could not (Deu. 32:31).

How does a nation or individual reach the point of being unable to think clearly about their actions? How can one be so senseless? Moses gives three causes: materialism, idolatry, and forgetfulness. Deuteronomy 32:15 says, “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: Thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; Then he forsook God which made him, And lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” Such is language of materialism. Israel got fat on God’s provision and grace then forgot the source of those

blessings and turned their back on Him. Their refusal to recognize and thank God as the source of blessing lead to their idolatry. “They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; To gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, Whom your fathers feared not” (Deu. 32:16-17). The only thing left was a complete removal of Jehovah from their minds. “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee” (Deu. 32:18; cf. Jer. 2:32). This was no incidental slip of the mind like losing a television remote or forgetting to put the trash out. This was a willful removal of the knowledge of Jehovah from their thoughts.

However, God’s desire for them was very different (Deu. 32:29-33). He wanted them to “be wise” and “understand” and “consider.” Wisdom has to do with the correct application of information, foresight, and skillful living. To “understand” is to “be attentive with scrutiny in order to produce wisdom.” To “consider” is to “perceive and to make the best choice.” The Lord wanted them to be able to examine the difficulties they had endured and recognize that the cause for such was their sinful actions. He wanted them to be like the Prodigal who “came to himself” and realized that being a servant in his father’s house was far better than dining with pigs (Luke 15:17-19). The trouble is that Israel had rejected God and to reject God is to reject wisdom—the ability to see life as it truly is! “For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding” (Pro. 2:6).

If one is to clearly see life as it truly is, then one must view life through the lenses of scripture. God’s Word is a lamp and a light (Ps. 119:105). David said, “The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Ps. 19:8). “The commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life” (Pro. 6:23). Had Israel listened to God their vision would have been clear. They would have been wise and able to see their latter end! The same is true for all humanity. But when we reject God and His will and embrace the philosophies and thinking of the world we suffer a very different outcome. We become wise to do evil and ignorant to what is good (Jer. 4:22). Lack of knowledge breeds destruction (Hos. 4:6) because outside of Jehovah there is no genuine knowledge or direction. The Father wanted Israel, His children, to see where their actions would lead. But, like the Pharisees in the days of Christ (John 9) they could not because they would not.

CW



“THE DECLINE AND FALL OF . . . AMERICA?”

Carl B. Garner

Many of us can recall the atmosphere of the late ‘50s and ‘60s. A constant state of fear of atomic warfare permeated our lives. We had seen the devastation of the first bombs over Japan, and we could not get it out of our minds. We can remember the “shoe-pounding” of Nikita Khrushchev in the United Nations. It wasn’t hard to imagine him “pushing the button” that would start a war that might “end all wars.” You could find plenty of places that would sell you an underground bomb shelter during those “cold war” years, and the chill was felt by us all. Things are different now. Many of the most war-like nations have made drastic changes, and war with Russia or Red China is not as likely today

That does not mean that things at home in the good ole’ USA are going “smooth and peacefully.” Threats today are more internal rather than external. Surveys tell us Americans are more concerned about crime, drugs, AIDS, and Swine Flu. Armed guards are in many of our schools. Alcoholism is on the rise. Pundits tell us our greatest threats locally are not bombs from foreign enemies but handguns in our schools that threaten our homes as well. At least, that is what we read and hear in the evening newscast.

We try not to panic, but when we look at our history we realize it is foolhardy to act as though nothing could happen. Historians still read and give attention to Edward Gibbon's classic work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. What destroyed the most powerful, influential nation of ancient times? It was not outside enemies with wicked warfare, but it was "a widespread immorality which destroyed family life" and their national integrity.

In 1831, Alexis de Toqueville visited America, and then he wrote a widely read book on our "experiment in democracy." Among other things, he wrote:

Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits aflame with righteousness did I learn the greatness and genius of America. America is great because America is good. If she ever ceases to be good she will cease to be great.

That was in 1831. What if he were to come to America today? Sure, he would see many great individuals and many good things. But who can say that he would hear "her pulpits aflame with righteousness"? Has America ceased to be "good"? In Proverbs 14:34 by inspiration, the wise man wrote, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Many years after de Toqueville's visit, this was posted in America's *Wall Street Journal*:

Basically what happened is that the "New Morality" of big cities like New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco was imposed upon the rest of the country by movies, by TV, by magazines, and by default, by organized religion. Oh, sure, church doors are open every Sunday, but unhappily for those who enter. Much contemporary American theology has come to be based on a kind of dainty religious mush that has more in common with the sentiments of Rod McKuen and John Lennon than the precepts of Isaiah or the Apostle John.

It may be argued that the *Wall Street Journal* is hardly the best source for judging America's sermons, but what they have written is hard to deny. Not until sin is denounced and abhorred will any nation have the right to start talking about "righteousness." It is not that unusual for people to depart a church building on Sunday morning feeling good about themselves, but not having been challenged and motivated by their preacher to live by higher biblical standards.

It starts with you and me. Nations are made up of people, and America's people must be taught to be good before America's people will be good. Preachers are human, and we have many of the same desires everyone else has. We want

to be true to the Lord, but it is very tempting to seek instead the favor of those who hear us preach. Solving this problem will take the efforts of all of us. Let us lead America back to greatness by insisting that the Bible be our measuring rod. Remember the words of 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

God's way will always be the best way.

CW

"I CAN LIVE WITH YOUR DISAPPROVAL"

Rick Brumback

I realize that I may have to start doing so simply based upon the title above. It is certainly not meant to be dismissive or cavalier. Nor is it meant to be a disrespectful statement of your relative worth as a fellow human. It is, instead, a considered statement of the value system I embrace and the cost I am willing to bear as I uphold that system. Let me explain.

We are to be concerned with the thoughts of others. If nothing else, the Golden Rule would dictate that I treat others in a fair and respectable way (Matt. 7:12). But there are other Biblical reminders of our obligations to treat others appropriately: "He that despiseth [holds in contempt, holds as insignificant – RB] his neighbor sinneth" (Pro. 14:21); "The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: (Pro. 15:2); "let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6); "Put them in mind ... to speak evil of no man, not to be contentious, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men" (Tit. 3:1-2). So by my title I am not attempting to justify rude or intentionally offensive behavior.

I am, however, bringing to the fore the fact that we are to be most concerned with what God thinks of us and our actions. We need to be concerned with ordering our lives according to His stipulations, irrespective of what others may think of these decisions (Ps. 119:133). As the psalmist said, "Depart from me, ye evildoers: for I will keep the commandments of my God" (Ps. 119:115). Even my own desires are to be subordinated to the wishes of Jehovah, just as Jesus voiced in Mark 14:36, "... nevertheless, not

HAS MAN OUTGROWN THE GOSPEL?

Allen Webster

what I will, but what thou wilt.” So my first concern is with pleasing the Lord, not myself, my family, my neighbors, my community, etc. Certainly it is He Who instructs me not to be careless in my dealings with others, as per above, but His will is to be placed first.

Which means that once we have affairs properly ordered in this way, we must continue down the course the Lord dictates regardless of what others think. And if there should be a conflict, I will tell you in advance what decision I will make. “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). And these words were uttered to the Jewish leaders who opposed Peter and the other apostles preaching about Jesus. But God told them to preach. The disapproval of the leaders of the people did not outweigh Peter’s sense of duty to the Lord. When Paul stood before Festus and King Agrippa, making defense of his actions in preaching about Christ, Festus mocked the apostle saying, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad” (Acts 26:24). How interesting to note his response – “I am not made, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness” (26:26). Far from being either disrespectful or cowering, Paul simply stated the truth – he had found a Way not to be denied or regretted. And then he voiced his desire that Agrippa be a Christian also! He did not need their approval; he wanted to win their hearts for Christ!

I can certainly attempt to bridge these gaps in understanding and relations; I need not be purposely callous or rude. My defiance is based upon greater, more sublime principles that reflect a higher calling. It is not predicated upon arrogance or disdain, but a desire to do what is right and, like Paul, seek to help others do the same.

Once again, I do not intend to be careless with your emotions or feelings. However, it is enough for me to know that the Lord is pleased with my course. And I know that those who tend to godly things will also approve my course. For all others, the changes may need to be made in their thoughts and values, not mine, and that is what leads to disapproval. I can live with that.

Times change. Today’s “new” is tomorrow’s “old,” this morning’s breakthrough is this afternoon’s castaway, this year’s popular is lost in next year’s “latest.” The up-to-date is soon out-of-date.

Truth doesn’t change. It reads the same today as yesterday and as it will tomorrow. It is “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). Some feel they have outgrown the ancient Gospel. The idea that there is a standard which is absolute is, to them, obsolete. The concepts of sin and spiritual death are replaced by the exaltation of self and sensuality. The idea of self-denial now to gain heaven later is given a passing thought—and then passed on. Bible concepts—power in the blood, a virgin-born, sinless, sacrificial, miraculously raised Savior—are but myths of a bygone era. Post-moderns have “grown up.” They don’t need the Gospel anymore. Or have they? **Has Man Outgrown the Gospel?**

Not Unless He Has Found Another Food for the Soul

Vegetables and fruits have been on kitchen tables since Eve prepared meals in the Garden, but no one is calling them outdated. Noah must have grilled the first T-bone just after the Flood, but—though several thousand years have passed—steak-houses still do pretty well. What nourishes the spirit? The Gospel fills those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6). Baby Christians first take the “sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2), and progress until they can eat “strong meat” at God’s table (Heb. 5:12-14). No one has found a substitute for God’s “soul food.”

Not Unless He Has Found Another Cure for Man’s Most Serious Disease

Medical treatments have been around at least since Moses (Lev. 12:1-4; Deut. 23:10-14), but nobody’s in a hurry to close hospitals and pharmacies. A cure for sin (forgiveness) is still man’s most basic spiritual need (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). We all have ancient Israel’s contagion: “From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa. 1:6). The only antidote has “Gospel” on the label (Rom. 1:16).

Look around—if anything, sin has greater influence now than it did with ancient man. Violence, greed, lust, selfishness, drunkenness, drugs...no society—yea, no individual—has mastered sin. Paul would say today what

CW



he said in A.D. 57: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Mankind has not conquered carnal desires. We are still prone to give in to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17). We cannot overcome without the power of the written Word (Heb. 4:12). Jesus used its power to defeat Satan in the “showdown in the desert” (Matt. 4:1-11); Paul urged Timothy to “make a good warfare” by it (1 Tim. 1:18); and we can only beat our adversary with the same time-tested weapon (Eph. 6:17).

Since the eternal God is the One who determines what sin is, sin does not change from culture to culture or with the passing winds of time. Men may change what they consider sin or what they call it (Isa. 5:20), but it will not alter reality. Sin is still transgressing God’s law (1 John 2:4); violating one’s conscience (Rom. 14:23); omitting a duty (Jas. 4:17); and, in general, “all unrighteousness” (1 John 5:17). We’ve all done it; thus we all need the cure that only the Gospel can give.

Not Unless He Has Found Another Map to Heaven

This world is not all there is. It is but the prelude to the main performance, the foreword to a great book, the entrance foyer to a grand hall, the gestation period of an endless life. Jesus used another figure. It is a short trip to an everlasting home. He plainly mapped out the road that leads to life (Matt. 7:14). He stated the conditions by which man can reach salvation. He must believe in Christ (Mark 16:16), change his sinful life (repent, Luke 13:5), confess Christ’s name (Rom. 10:9-10), and be immersed for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4). Some have tried to invent their own ways to heaven, but their maps will only get a person lost. If we follow the “Faith Only Lane” or “Works Avenue,” or “Direct Spirit Leading Way,” or the popular path, “Once Saved, Always Saved,” we are traveling the various lanes of the interstate Jesus called a “broad way that leads to destruction” (Matt. 7:13). Jesus is the “way, truth, and life”—and His way is only found in His Book (John 14:6).

Not Unless He Has Found Another Weapon Satan Fears

The old lion isn’t dead; he is still “roaring...walking about seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The serpent is not hibernating; he still lurks to entice, entrap, and engulf the simple (Gen. 3:1-7; 2 Cor. 11:3). Man is still in danger; therefore, he needs the one weapon which makes Satan cringe. A lion does not fear a rock in the hand of a child; Satan does not fear man’s strength in man’s hand. He does fear God’s power in man’s hand (“It is written,” Matt. 4:1-11; James 4:7).

Not Unless He Can Make Life Meaningful Without It

The Bible is able to make us “complete” (2 Tim. 3:17). Its message fills the void found in every heart. It has the power to convert (change) a person. The Gospel has power to “translate” us from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear son (Col. 1:13). In every case of conversion in the New Testament (see the book of Acts), someone preached the Word, which produced a change in the hearers.

An American skeptic visiting the jungle came across a native reading the Bible. He told him, “Over in America people no longer read that old Book.” The native said nothing for a moment and then responded in broken dialect, “This Book teach me not to eat you!” Would the writings of Hume, Voltaire, Ingersoll, Paine, Russell, or O’Hare have had such effect on a cannibal?

A stewardess came down an aisle asking what each passenger wanted to drink. Several in a row said, “Make mine a martini.” Coming to the next seat, she noted a man with an open Bible. Somehow it seemed inappropriate to ask a Bible-reader if he desired a martini, so she said, “Tomato Juice, Sir?” he later observed, “Now what other book could I have been reading that would change a martini into tomato juice?”

Those who change the Gospel put themselves under God’s curse (Gal. 1:6-9), and will find that it will meet them in judgment unchanged (Rev. 20:12). Those who choose to ignore it will find it was the one great essential of their earthly pilgrimage (2 Thess. 1:9).

Let’s not cast away the only Book God ever wrote!

CW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

It is apparent from these inspired words; many have accepted the counterfeit and the sham of manmade religions and the debauchery of a hellish world, because they have no experience in the Word of God. They have not used the Word nor have they labored to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), Therefore, they are ill equipped to “discern both good and evil.” With such a deficiency in their spiritual diet, they are helpless to even recognize that which is excellent, much less maintain an ability to make a stand. However, if we immerse ourselves in the Word of God and dedicate ourselves to learning His Word, then we will be well equipped to stand for things that are excellent.

If we invest our time accordingly, we will recognize the excellence of moral purity and take our stand there. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). Again Paul advised Timothy, in the context of

the selection and appointing of elders, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). As the church which belongs to Christ, we must live in such a way that puts a strong emphasis on that broad line of demarcation that must exist between the people of God and the hellish world. James wrote, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). John also wrote,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

As the New Testament church our actions and speech must reflect a consistent agreement with that which is excellent.

Second, we will recognize the excellence of doctrinal purity and take our stand there. It is amazing how so many can belittle the word of God and the teachings therein and expect to develop a stronger faith and relationship with their God. Amos asked a powerful question when he asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). This very principle is seen in John’s words in his second epistle. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ is based upon our acceptance of and walking in the “doctrine of Christ.” A good commentary on this passage is found in 1 Timothy 6:

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Paul maintains the exact attitude John did concerning the necessity of our putting our approval on doctrinal excellence if we desire fellowship with our God. As the New Testament church, our teaching and preaching must reflect a consistent agreement with that which is excellent.

Finally, we will recognize the excellence of a sincere love for the souls of men and take our stand there. Jesus asked these penetrating questions. “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark. 8:36-37). We are the followers of Christ and, as such, we must also recognize the value of the souls of men.

First we will understand the value of our own soul and strive to maintain that relationship with God that feeds the soul that it may be strong. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and kills our soul (Eph. 2:1). Therefore, we must avoid sin by overcoming the temptations that are set before us. In so doing we reflect our knowledge of the value of the soul.

Second, we will realize the value of the souls of our brethren. Especially is this true concerning those that have erred from the truth. Paul stressed the attitude and action that righteous men will have concerning the erring. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1). Again James wrote, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (Jas. 5:19, 20). Such love will not always be easy. In fact, it will at times be very difficult to follow through with that which is so needed. Jesus said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev. 3:18). There will be times when the excellent way will be to withdraw from the ungodly (1 Cor. 5), and we must take such a stand for excellence if we love our Lord and the souls of men.

Finally, we will realize the value of the souls of those that populate the lost world. Evangelism is certainly the excellent way and that is where we as the Lord’s church must make our stand. Solomon wrote, “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Pro. 11:30). Jesus commanded such (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24), and in so doing He forever defined it as the excellent way. As the Lord’s people, we must recognize the excellence of a sincere love for the souls of men and take our stand there.

Jesus spoke of two ways in which men would walk (Matt. 7:13-14) and each of us must make our choice. As members of the church, we are obligated to stand for that which is excellent. May we ever labor to distinguish the difference and take our stand on that which is excellent as we study our Bibles more and more.



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From the Director's desk



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What would the congregation say about their preacher after he left? What would the church say about the missionaries after they returned home? What about area congregations and Christians - how would they characterize the work of certain ministers? What kind of impact do we as preachers leave on people when our time working together comes to an end?

When we study 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, we see the kind of impact that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had on their Macedonian brethren. Their reputation was based on observations about the local congregation and the spreading of that news around the area. Preachers and teachers will be judged both in this life and on that Great Day. As those who humbly point people to the Savior, we know that people will observe our lives and our teaching and share those things with others. That is okay. What was noticeable about Paul, Silas, and Timothy and what can we learn about it today?

First, the brethren noticed that their ministry could be characterized by work. The work of the preacher was not a passive one as they had to labor among the brethren (cf. 1 Thess. 2:9). If the preacher is lazy, everyone will know. Second, the brethren recognized that the missionaries were partners with, not lords over the local church. The work of ministers of the gospel is not one of supremacy but servitude, not of position but partnership. Third, their work in Thessalonica was obvious because of the change in the congregation as the members turned from sin to serve God. This change was not in service times nor window dressing; this change was evident in the way the church conducted itself. The change, repentance, was seen in their lives. The work of ministers is not in tinkering with auxiliary matters; it is in delivering a life-changing message week in and week out. Fourth, they preached a message of hope. The gospel, by its nature, condemns man in his sin and illuminates the wrath to come. But, the gospel, by its nature, gives man great hope. When the preacher descends from the pulpit walks away from the podium, or stands up from the kitchen table, he may have delivered a message about sin, but he should certainly leave that place showing people the hope we all have in Jesus.

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