

EXCERPTS FROM

JULY – SEPTEMBER 1981

THE LINK

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)

BIDEFORD

Internet Edition

"TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR" (Mark 4:24)

Does the kind of preaching we listen to matter? In the many pulpits throughout the land there are a great variety of preachers setting before their congregations differing theories and often their own particular emphasis or slant on matters spiritual.

The "broad minded" person will say that it makes no difference, for it is one and the same religion; we worship the same God, though maybe in a different way.

The "ecumenist" takes the view that each church organisation has a particular element of truth which is essential to the whole; each has a part to play and he embraces and listens to all.

Others may not be altogether happy with their pulpit, nevertheless, for the sake of peace go along with it and only too often find themselves in a position of having to tolerate mixture and error.

The Lord himself warned his followers "Take heed what ye hear". We must be jealous regarding the preaching under which we sit. To settle down under a ministry which is not sound is a very serious matter. We are to "Cease to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19:27). Where unscriptural or even weak preaching prevails, it is bound to have a damaging effect on the health of the soul, and none should wilfully submit to this.

The present-day tendency is for believers to tolerate rather than protest. This reflects the spirit of the age in which we live and which, sadly, has infiltrated into the church. It is argued; one must be democratic, tolerant and see the other man's point of view. This attitude may have a place in certain areas of life, but not when it has to do with the doctrine and teachings of Holy Scripture, here we are concerned with an infallible yardstick - THIS IS TRUTH - and from it we must not deviate. The rule must ever be "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

The late Bishop J. C. Ryle wrote: "Christians should no more tolerate false doctrine than they would tolerate sin". Alas, many do; there must be no controversy amongst us, they say; we must be at peace. This is very wrong. The truth of God as taught by the Apostles must not be diluted or tampered with, and TRUTH must not be sacrificed for peace.

Those who turn a deaf ear to defective teaching and a blind eye to questionable practices ought to bear in mind the words of Gal. 2:11-14. Paul did not hesitate to withstand Peter, although he was a brother in the Lord and many years his senior. "He was to be blamed" (Gal.2:11), he says.

In the 4th century A.D. Athanasius waged a great battle against the major part of the professing church over the divinity of our Lord: it caused tremendous dissension. Martin Luther absolutely disrupted the unity of the church in which he had been brought up, and fearlessly denounced popery. These men disturbed the peace and even caused great division for the sake of TRUTH, but were they wrong?

It was bitter controversy, even bloodshed, which brought about the Protestant deformation. For the sake of TRUTH, men lived and died. Had they not done MO we should still have been living' in darkness and superstition, subject to the thralldom of the papal system, with its attendant evils and cut off from God's pure Word, with only the prospect of purgatory at the end.

Yet, the ecumenist of to-day and the LIBERAL EVANGELICAL, both act and speak as if the deformation was a big mistake, and that it is to be regretted that ever such a controversy raged and Christians thus acted - PERISH SUCH REASONING.

Peace without truth is a worthless thing. Unity which is not the true unity of the Spirit must not only be shunned, it must be positively resisted and denounced.

It behoves the believer to be on his guard, not only against false teaching but also defective preaching and not to submit to it. We are told to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess.5:21) "earnestly contend for

the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3). To contend means, to strive in opposition, to maintain by argument, to convince this in relation to THE WHOLE TRUTH, not contend for some parts and ignore others.

It is a grave reflection on many evangelicals that they have not stood their ground. Defective preaching in many places goes unchallenged to-day, from pulpits which were established on sound doctrine. To denounce false teachers, unscriptural practices and questionable movements so prevalent at the present time, would be anathema.

Magazines and journals produced by some who would claim to be most orthodox, are silent. One has looked in vain for many a year to see lights of warning flashed and a 'CERTAIN SOUND ON THE TRUMPET'; Alas', the long reign of the dumb dog and of the sleeping shepherd' has ushered in the era of the wolf, the thief and the robber. To quote J. C. Ryle again, he says, "three things there are which men ought never to trifle with:

1. A little poison.
2. A little sin.
3. A little false doctrine".

The Christian is to be vigilant and discerning, ever alert to deviation from truth and not allow his soul to be fed with either polluted or diluted food; for this will stunt his growth, numb his conscience and eventually paralyse his spiritual faculties.

There are many sincere Christians who long for sound, wholesome biblical ministry, who desire true fellowship but are in a spiritual wilderness. Such need our prayers for encouragement to:

1. Contend earnestly, unceasingly and uncompromisingly for the WHOLE counsel of God, within their particular situation.

2. Be diligent in private study of the Word of God for themselves, "give attendance to reading" (1 Tim.4:13). Many superb biblical works have been reprinted and are available at the present time.
3. Make use of tape recordings. Sound expository ministry enjoyed by the more favoured, is in this way available to those who are isolated, and this can be of great profit and blessing by setting aside at least one hour each week in the home for a preaching session by tape, perhaps being joined by others of like mind.

By these means the soul can be fed and nurtured, spiritual faculties strengthened, enabling the child of Jed, in barren areas to contend more effectually and may in the providence of God lead to a better spiritual climate in their district.

Let no sincere believer settle down complacently under a defective ministry. TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR (Mark 4:24).

W.H.M.

PROVIDENCE. One of the most notorious heretics ever to appear in the history of the Church of Christ was the monk, Pelagius. Had it not been for the work and teaching of Augustine, the influence of Pelagius would have been, humanly speaking, universal and complete. However, the intervention of God is "wondrous in our eyes." On the same day that Pelagius was born in Britain, Augustine was born in Africa. Although God was going to permit a sifting time for His church on the earth, He was also preparing the fulfilment of His promise, that, "when the enemy comes in like a flood, then shall the Lord raise up a standard."

We are grateful to Mr. M. R. Kimmitt, Editor of the magazine PEACE and TRUTH, published by the Sovereign Grace Union, for allowing us to include the following article written by him and which appeared in that magazine in 1978.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is bringing to a close the discourse we call 'The Sermon on the mount'. He has been setting before His hearers the characteristics which His followers will possess. At this point he urges them to be concerned about their salvation:

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt.7:13-14). and it is in the context of this frightening fact that he adds a solemn warning against being misled: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits."

What connotations would such a remark produce in the minds of His hearers? Surely they would think back to their own national history where so often the true prophet of Jehovah had been opposed by the false prophets of heathen religions or even by false prophets pretending to come in the name of the one true God. Elijah against 450 prophets of Baal; Micaiah against Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah and some 400 companions; the prophet Jeremiah against the prophet Hananiah. One of the perplexities which must have faced the people of God in Old Testament times must have been the problem created by false prophets. A 'prophet of Baal' was relatively simple - either one followed the one true God or one went along with the new 'religious establishment' that Jezebel was bringing in. But a false prophet purporting to speak in the name of Jehovah could be a very subtle snare - particularly for tender consciences.

But if that is the picture our Lord's words would produce in the minds of His hearers yet we must ask ourselves what is their significance to us upon whom the ends of time have come: for our Lord is not just addressing

His immediate hearers, but warning His followers of any and every succeeding age.

There were of course prophets in the early church. But that office died out with the completion of scripture. All we now need to know "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" is available in the Bible, "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim.3:16-17) There may be a place in some specialised circumstances for specific warnings, analogous to those recorded in the Book of Acts about the famine in Jerusalem or the dangers in Paul visiting that city; and Christian history has many instances, not least in Reformed circles, of such 'insights'. But in principle all that we now need to know is available in the Word of God. Almost by definition therefore a person claiming- a prophetic gift is a false prophet!

It would however narrow our Lord's warning too much to limit it to such relatively infrequent incidents. What surely is in mind is a warning against false teaching and false teachers. The prophetic office is, by an obvious analogy, used for all who teach, whether by pen or from the pulpit, and specifically for 'those who labour in the word and in doctrine.' And what our Lord is saying is to 'take heed what we hear.'

Now there is no particular difficulty in recognising false teaching given by avowed enemies of Christianity, any more than there was in the case of the prophets of Baal, though we should still recognise the dangers of being influenced by it. And again we may readily detect the errors implicit in Romanism, Modernism or the heretical cults, even though they all say they speak in the name of the one true God and the errors be more subtle. The problem, the danger, for us, as Evangelicals, is the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' the man who professes to be one of the flock, who comes in perhaps with some sort of ecclesiastical authority, and yet ultimately turns out to be false.

Clearly this was a problem for the early church too. Apart from our Lord's warning we find, for instance, the church in Galatia turned out of the way by false teachers; Peter says "there shall be false teachers among you," John warns that "many false prophets are gone out into the world"

and Jude that "there should be mockers in the last time." Paul, in that appended discourse to the Ephesian elders recorded in Acts 20, having reminded them of his own ministry "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you...For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God," (and surely one mark of a false teacher is simply that he is partial in his teaching) urges them to:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

And indeed so well did the church at Ephesus learn its lesson that some 40 years later the risen, exalted Christ is commending them for the fact that: "thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars."

What was true of the early church is all too clearly writ large on the life of the church from then until now. Time after time men have arisen who have taught falsely and led astray. That great movement of the Spirit which we call the Reformation was a tremendous attempt to get back to the true after a long period of Apostasy and decay.

But still the problem is with us. As we listen to sermons, read books and the various Christian journals and newspapers, sooner rather than later we come across siren voices propounding ideas - often with the best motives - and saying 'this is the way, walk ye in it, but which on examination turn out to be simply false.

What then is our safeguard? I suggest it is to be found in the great Protestant principle: 'The Right of Private Judgment.' Indeed, I think the phrase is too weak; it should be: 'The Duty of Private Judgment,' for we are clearly commanded to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." It was because the members of the early church failed

in their duty that "the Apostasy of Iniquity" rose to the point it did. It is because we are failing in our duty that we find ourselves in the confused situation of today. The point I am making, and the point I am concerned to ram home to you, the reader, is on the one hand the great danger, spiritual danger, danger to our salvation we are in from subtly wrong teaching, either from pen or from pulpit, and on the other hand the only safeguard of bringing everything to the one infallible standard - conformity to the Word of God. Let the innovations in worship, or whatever it is that is proposed, be tested by Scripture and all will be well, but if they are not, the only result will be increasing apostasy and trouble.

how clearly there is a right and wrong way of going about this. We may be so aware of the dangers that we develop a hypercritical over-reaction. Possibly in the heat or stress of delivering a sermon some unguarded or unhappy phrase may have been used by the preacher, men are not to be condemned or judged for such; particularly if, when the matter is pointed out, the remark is withdrawn. Again, a genuinely converted man may, through prejudice or bad teaching, hold an erroneous viewpoint. Such may be won to a more scriptural position by kindness rather than criticism. In this connection one thinks of Priscilla and Aquila's wise handling of Apollos as recorded in Acts 17.

But if the error is deliberate and determined - as it was for instance in the case of the Galatian Judaizers - then from such we are commanded to turn away. In recent years what might be called the 'Evangelical consensus' has badly broken down and therefore it is urgent that we should be on our guard.

"The grace of God does not find men fit for salvation, but makes them so." - Augustine.

"Who need fear men who is in league with God" -
John Trapp.

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE & PRACTICE OF PREACHING
(Concluded)

General characteristics

T.H.L.Parker says "The predominant characteristic of Calvin's sermons is clarity of thought and expression. Thought follows thought in a careful orderly arrangement without muddle. Each idea is expressed clearly, often in two or three ways. We might disagree with the idea - but we cannot doubt its meaning. This clarity comes from a careful use of words. There is a general scarcity of adjectives ... Calvin loads his nouns and verbs with meaning. The delivery is conversational, but not given to verbiage". Calvin seems to have cultivated simplicity of language. This, of course, is something which demands painstaking study and discipline.

There is a marked lack of the display of learning in Calvin's sermons. There are very few quotations from the classical writers (and only introduced to clarify what is being said). Since they do arise in his other works, he obviously was well versed in them and we can only conclude that his lack of use in the sermons was deliberate. Decker says: "Calvin avoids the use of academic and technical terms in his preaching, and, when it is necessary to use them, they are carefully explained. He also to a surprising extent avoids the use of abstract nouns. One who knows him only in his theological works might expect his pulpit style to be heavy and colourless. On the contrary ... it moves lightly. There is a liberal use of picturesque and graphic terms. Many sentences sparkle with concrete and vivid words. Calvin employs fetching simile and metaphor taken from everyday life" (introduction to Sermons from Job).

Calvin's sermons are not theological; that is, it is not their purpose to establish theological tenets. Examples of this abound in the sermons from Job: e.g. in the sermon on Job 9:1-6 "I know it is true that a man shall not be justified in God's sight". Most of today's preachers would deal straight away with the doctrine of justification by faith, the imputation of Christ's righteousness and the futility of works. Not so Calvin! He deals with this in a few sentences at the end. For the rest he stays in his context - Job on the dunghill and he draws the people into that experience. On "I know that my Redeemer lives" Calvin

does not deal extensively with the resurrection of Christ. He says "If they were taken out of context they would not be to any great edification and we would not know what Job wished to say" (Sermons from Job). Decker observes: "Many readers will be surprised in reading this sermon both on what Calvin says and what he does not say". The same is true when he comes to "Though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". Indeed, it is interesting that Calvin deals with this separately from the previous verse. A dogmatic, eschatological interest would no doubt have kept them together. Calvin, then, is a true expositor.

Calvin's use of illustrations is also interesting. They are never used to pad, to give light relief, to entertain; they are never ornamental, but are used to clarify the meaning. There is frequent use of colloquialisms and proverbs, usually suffixed by a phrase such as "as we say". Familiar things are used as explanatory pictures of the unfamiliar. For example, the hope of being saved by merits is like "bringing a farthing to pay off a debt of a million crowns". Concerning the wicked he says: "their sins are so many they seem to be pickled in them". Again, he says "we are so astonished at this doctrine that it is as if a man had hit us on the head with a hammer". Debating against God is "throwing themselves off their hinges". When their sins are pointed out, the wicked "throw their snouts into the ground like hogs". The proud "admire their feathers like peacocks". "We hop like toads and imagine ourselves galloping like runaway horses".

Calvin was not averse to using humour in the pulpit, though instances are not common. Parker makes the point: "The picture that is drawn of Calvin as a morose stoic rejecting all joy from his life is far from the truth. His brilliant witty conversation made him, in his rare moments of leisure, the best of companions and kept his supper parties rocking with laughter". His pulpit humour is subtle wit and satire rather than obvious, open humour. For example, commenting on the Pope, from whose mouth comes no word of doctrine, he says "that would detract from his dignity", (sermons on 2 Tim.)

Manner of Delivery

Calvin's sermons are characterised by a gravity and earnestness which sprang from the urgency of the situation: either the plight of the unconverted because of the wrath of God, or of believers needing encouragement or exhortation. Calvin believed that the manner of preaching should reflect the Gospel and its author. The seriousness of the Gospel is reflected in his sober prose and his shunning of frivolity. He believed sermons should be lively because "we are the trumpets of the living God".

His concern in his famed letter to Somerset, Regent of England, is for lively sermons: "There is very little preaching of a lively kind in the Kingdom, but the greater part deliver it by way of reading from a written discourse (a reference to the Book of Homilies). I see very well the necessity constraining you to that, for first you do not have the well-approved and competent pastors that you desire. Therefore, you need at once to supply this want. Second there may well be flighty persons among them who would go beyond their bounds, sowing their own silly fancies. But all this should not prevent the ordinance of Christ from having free course. Preaching ought not to be lifeless but lively, to teach, exhort, reprove. If any unbeliever enter he should be effectually arrested and convinced as Paul says. Paul also says in another place, we ought to speak with lively power and energy - not with a parade of rhetoric to gain esteem for ourselves"

Calvin's earnestness on occasion turned to severity and even anger: "How can they preach without getting angry?" he asks in his sermon on Job 32:1-5. "Can we see a mortal and feeble creature raise himself against the majesty of God, to trample all true doctrine underfoot, and bear it patiently? We should show by that that there was no zeal for God in us".

Lest you should think that Calvin's delivery was dry and uninteresting let me remind you of a fact we know as to the warmth of his preaching. The ancient record has 'warmth'; what is meant is 'fervour'. Quite early on Raguénier asked for help in taking down the sermons as they were delivered. The problem was that when Calvin came to a passage where he spoke with 'warmth'. Raguénier found he was

missing words and phrases. So another scribe was appointed to help and when Calvin began to speak with 'warmth' he took out his pen and took down the passage as well, as Hague nie r and in this way they were able to get down all the words.

The people should prepare for the sermon by praying that the Spirit will enlighten. They should not imagine that they will understand everything that is said to them. "We have not the Spirit to understand anything pertaining to the spiritual Kingdom of God...but the Lord will give us understanding in all things that, as he gives us his Word, so he will open our eyes and our ears and will not only give intelligence but will also speak to our hearts so that we shall follow him when he calls us", (sermons on 2 Tim.).

THE "DRIVE-IN" CHURCH

From the 19th July until the 6th September there will be no service in the Chapel at 6.30 pm. on Sundays. Instead we shall concentrate on the "Drive-in" Church which will be held in the River Bank Car Park at the same time, i.e. 6.30 pm. Please pray for these meetings as the Word of God is proclaimed in this way.

CASSETTES are available either on sale at £1.25 each or on loan. Each tape consists of two addresses and comprise in-depth studies on the following subjects:

1. The Attributes of God.
 2. The Life of David.
 3. The Atonement.
 4. Spiritual Union.
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"True religion teaches us to do everything as in the presence of God." - Matthew Henry.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please note that visiting Preachers and Special Meetings for this quarter are as follows:

Sundays

19 th July	-	Mr K. Matrunola from Portsmouth
26 th July	-	Mr. P. Hallihan from Snailbeach (near Shrewsbury).
2 nd Aug.	-	Mr. H. Mason from Stoke-on-Trent
9 th Aug.	-	Mr. J. Roberts (Gen. Sec. Lord's Day Observance Society)
23 rd Aug.	-	Mr. K. Dix from Dunstable
30 th Aug.	-	Mr. J. Thackway from Devizes
13 th Sept.	-	Mr. K. Davies from Cambourne
20 th Sept.	-	Mr. M. Watts from Salisbury

Thursday

2 nd July	-	Mr. F. Stanbury from Bow
6 th Aug.	-	" " " "
3 rd Sept.	-	" " " "

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

To be held SATURDAY 25th JULY 1981.

Guest Speaker - Mr. P. Hallihan (Snailbeach, nr. Shrewsbury)

Afternoon at 3.30pm. - Tea at 5pm. Evening 6.00 pm.

ANNUAL MEETING - TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

To be held SATURDAY 22nd AUGUST 1981

Guest Speaker - Mr. K. Dix (Dunstable) -Deputation Secretary

Evening at 6.30 pm.