

"The Essentials For Our Proclamation"
I Timothy 4

In keeping with the theme of this Convention and as we face the tremendous opportunities that are before us as Southern Baptists, I would remind you, as Paul reminded Timothy, that the only combination that is equal to our task of Proclamation is doctrine, dynamics and discipline.

Proclamation is the supreme item on God's program. Churches today often require so much of their ministers--so many things God never requires--that he has not time to preach the preaching that God bids him.

The first business of the preacher is to preach. He has other functions, but he is first of all a preacher. We hear and read a great deal about "let the church be the church", but I believe it is high time the churches learned to let the preacher be a preacher. He was never meant to be a bellboy.

Paul says, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves, your servants for Jesus' sake." Look at the triangular arrangement of the last half of that verse--"ourselves"--"your servants"--"for Jesus sake." The preacher is not just the servant of the church -- period. He is not a church flunky. He is the servant of the people only insofar and inasmuch as it is for Jesus' sake--that qualifies it.

Proclamation or preaching is God's appointed means of getting out the gospel, and I believe that when it is done right, you do not have to prop it up with anything else. God did not say, "How shall they hear without a brass band?" He said, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Paul said that when he was called, "immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood." Today we do it the other way around. About the first thing we do is to confer with flesh and blood to get man's approval and approbation.

Alexander Whyte said that Paul went through Arabia with Moses and the Psalms and

and the prophets in his knapsack, and came back with Romans and Ephesians and Colossians in his heart. What a trip that was for Paul. Ministers today need to take such a trip or excursion.

Paul makes a threefold appeal to Timothy, and through him to all preachers and concerning all Proclamation.

1. First of all he will have him give attention to DOCTRINE.

Take heed unto doctrine, and to exhort with all long suffering in doctrine. He also reminds him that the time will come when people cannot endure sound doctrine.

Doctrine is frowned upon in many quarters today. Sometime ago a newspaper editor commended a popular preacher with these words: "His sermons expound the principles of the good life and are not concerned with doctrine." In this one tragic sentence we find the explanation for spiritual poverty of our day. This dearth of vital Christianity is apparent on many sides. Could this be the reason for the present day degrading of national politics to the inferior level of expediency rather than that of moral principle?

Recently I heard a preacher say-- "We are not interested in doctrines." But what he meant to say was that they were not interested in Biblical doctrine. You see -- the philosophy of Karl Marx is doctrine. So is the philosophy of Emanuel Kant, Charles Darwin, John Dewey or Julian Huxley! Webster tells us that doctrine is teaching, instruction, or that which is taught; a body of principles; a principle in any branch of knowledge, tenet, dogma or principles of faith.

However, these man-made doctrines are not what Paul calls "sound doctrine," for they are not based on the revelation of God. Jude reminds us that our faith was "once and for all" delivered unto the saints. Sound doctrines of God's Word do not fluctuate. Scientific theories and materialistis philosophies change with the passing days--but doctrines of God's revelation are constant.

It is easy today to grow weary of the battle and sink into a twilight zone, and into

conditions of low visibility where black and white becomes a blend of indefinite gray. My Bible says that we are to walk in white, and it is a sad day when any preacher begins to wear the gray garb of compromise.

What am I to proclaim? "Preach the Word!" When am I to preach? "In season and out of season." How am I to preach it? "Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." Why am I to preach it? Because the time will come when they cannot take it-- Has that time come?

Somewhere I read the title, "The Art of Almost Saying Something." That is quite in vogue today, not only in legislative halls, public speeches, public press, but even in pulpits. The preacher gets off to a good start, and you think, now he is going to hit the nail on the head, but just before he gets to the point he swerves and executes a neat detour. He almost says it--but not quite.

Old Erasmus must have been good at that. They said he could shade up a YES til it sounded like NO, and burnish up NO until it would pass for YES.

Some of our vague preaching sounds all right. It offends nobody, and it will take you a long way in this world, but this world is not the right world to get a long way in. At the end of the road you meet God, and God always has something to say. This old Book does not almost state the case--when it says it, it stays said.

Just because we have a generation of itching ears instead of burning hearts is no reason we should trim our doctrine to suit general unbelief.

If Timothy was not ready doctrinally, he was not ready--period. A lot of church members would not know the difference if you took a text from the Koran on Sunday morning, but God expects us to know the difference, and God expects us to preach doctrine, good doctrine, sound doctrine--no other doctrine.

II. The second admonition of Paul had to do with DYNAMICS.

"Stir up the gift of God that is within you."

Timothy must have been a timid soul. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Now, if Timothy come, see that he may be with you without fear." I think Timothy had the faith and the facts, but he was out of fire, he was missing in dynamics.

Some Baptists have heat and don't shine, some shine but they do not generate any warmth. Bishop Moore used to say he would rather cool off a fanatic than to warm up a corpse. There is such a thing as having the facts and faith without the fire.

We have efficiency, but efficiency without His sufficiency is only a deficiency. We are afraid today in some quarters even to talk about being filled with the Spirit, just because some extremists may have gone overboard on the subject. Whatever it is, my friends, most folks don't have it. I would rather a fellow have the wrong terminology and the right experience, than to have it the other way about, though we ought to have both to be sure.

John Wesley had an Oxford education. He had a godly ancestry. He was a man of prayer. He was a separated man. He did his best to live a godly life. He was a missionary--he even tried to convert Indians to the Lord. But for all that he was not ready to preach. I do not know exactly what happened to Wesley at Aldersgate, but I know he was not ready to preach until it happened. Most of our preachers are tireless and too many of us are fireless.

People today like preaching that is shallow--something very light without any demands on the congregation. But if we are going to do New Testament preaching and defend the faith, it has to be done in super-natural power.

We have the gift of God, but it may be like sugar in coffee--it need stirring, or better still, to use the figure Paul had in mind here--a fire that needs rekindling. Let me ask you, has the fire of God died down in your soul, and is so covered with ashes that you are scarcely aware of its presence? If so, we must scrape off the ashes and expose the coals and let the breath of the Spirit blow across until the fire is rekindled in our hearts. That is what Paul is telling Timothy.

Christmas Evans was on his way to a preaching appointment one Saturday afternoon.

He said, "God convicted me of a cold heart. I stopped and tied my horse, and went into the woods, and for four hours I waited upon God, and I could feel as it were in my heart the breaking up of a hard winter."

God save us from being guilty of a cold heart.

III. Finally, Paul exhorts Timothy with regard to DISCIPLINE.

"God gave us not a spirit of fearfulness; but of power and love and "discipline!" (A.S.V.) As weak as we are doctrinally, and as weak as we are in dynamic, we are weakest of all on this.

A New Testament Christian is a believer, a disciple and a witness. Our churches are full of believers; but if you tell those believers that God expects them to be disciples, and if you call on them to deny self, take up the Cross, keep the body under and bring every thought captive, and keep themselves un-spotted from the world, they will resent that intrusion. They will say the preached is meddling and interfering.

After all, the great Commission does not send us out to make believers--it sends us out to make disciples! Of course you have to be a believer in order to be a disciple, but notice it says DISCIPLE. God is out to make saints out of sinners.

Crisis must be followed by continuance. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

I think we preachers, without meaning to do so, are guilty of having created an artificial distinction in the minds of a great many people between taking Jesus as Saviour and confessing Christ as Lord. After all, that verse in Romans 10 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord." Paul, when he met the Lord Jesus said "Who art thou Lord,?" "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

I don't believe that you can get saved on the installment plan. I don't believe that you can get saved with your fingers crossed and one hand behind your back saying to yourself, "I take Jesus as my Saviour, and then I won't have to go to hell. I won't di

do anything about confessing Him as Lord. If I never submit to His Lordship--the only thing I will lose will be my reward." I don't believe you can be saved that way. I believe you must take Jesus Christ for all that you know Him to be at that time, and as the Word of God presents Him.

We are in such an everlasting hurry to get prospects into our churches. Why, bless your hearts, Jesus lost some of the best prospects He ever had. He lost three in a row in the 9th Chapter of Luke. And what about the rich you ruler? He had manners--kneeling; morals--commandments; money--wouldn't turn it loose. But Jesus wasn't out for joiners, He was out for disciples! Let me make this plain: Salvation is Free--not Cheap! It is Free! A thing can be free and not be cheap. It cost plenty! It cost God His Son, and it cost the Son His Life; but it is free to you--the "Gift of God is eternal life."

But discipleship will cost you everything you have. I think we ought to be fair with people today. They ought to understand what they are in for. The moment they get saved they are under new management.

You have but one option in this world. You can receive the Lord Jesus, or you can reject Him. But if you ever receive Him, you don't have any more option--that is the end of it. You belong to Him. "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price." This idea that if I want to go to church on Sunday, it is my business; if I want to stay at home, it is my business; if I want to give a tithe to the Lord, it is up to me; if I want to serve in this capacity or that, it is up to me.

You don't have any rights if you have become a Christ--you belong to Him! Why is it that we have to wear ourselves out telling church members what they ought to have known the day they received Christ as Saviour--that Jesus is Lord of all.

The early Christians used to say, "Jesus is Lord." They died for that! They paid the price! But today we have a crowd of believers, many of whom show no evidence of being disciples, and of course if not disciples, they are not witnesses.

Discipling calls for discipling. And if a preacher is going to preach discipling

hē has to practice it on himself. He cannot "entangle himself with the affairs of this life," if he is to "please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." I believe that the seriousness of the hour and the shortness of the time and the shallowness of our hearts demand as never before that we walk circumspectly, "Because the days are evil."

No preacher has any business allowing anything in his life that has even a question mark after it. Jesus Christ deserves even the question mark. And some of you have argued for something you are doing for so long you think it is right--maybe. You have excused yourself for years, and you will not pay the price to win the crown. You will not discipline yourself so God may properly use you.

Well--there you have it--doctrine, dynamic and discipline--and it is only the combination that is equal to the task before us. For both preacher and people, both in pulpit and in pew, we need doctrine that we may believe--we need discipline that we may behave. This is God's combination. It is a high standard, but I believe that we can reach it by the grace of God.

The tendency today is to look for a standard to suit us. I heard of a battle engagement where the flag got away ahead of the soldiers. The officer called to his superior that the flag should come back to the regiment, but the superior thundered, "NO, make the regiment catch up!"

The flag has gotten away ahead of us--the flag of doctrine, the flag of dynamic, and the flag of discipline, and it is becoming quite fashionable in all three cases to bring the flag back to the regiment. I beg you, if you belong to the regiment of the soldiers of the Cross, whether as preacher or layman, instead of accommodating these high standards to your manner of living, ask God to enable you by the Holy Spirit to catch up with the flag.