

THE GREENWOOD BULLETIN

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VOLUME 7 NO. 33

October 17, 2010

Sound Doctrine Produces Sound Churches Demanding Sound Doctrine

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"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."-- 2 Tim. 4:1-4.

A local church is going to be about as strong and sound as the preaching it receives and is willing to endure and support. Paul's solemn charge to Timothy had a sense of urgency about it. Preach the word now, while brethren will endure it, or face a time when they will not.

For several years this writer has been paying particular attention as seasoned brethren (preachers and otherwise) express their concerns about the churches of today. The one dominant concern seems to be the caliber of preaching coming from our pulpits of late. As one old soldier of the cross expressed it to me, "I am getting tired of going to gospel meetings and hearing 'fluff.'" He went on to explain what he meant by "fluff." Preaching that contained very little real Bible teaching.

Brethren, strong congregations cannot be built and maintained on "fluff." Did you ever buy cotton candy? Then you know what "fluff" is. I remember, as a youngster, that I would spend

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my dime on a huge stick of it at the county fair. It was spun and displayed so as to make me think that I was getting a lot more for my money than I was. I soon learned that I had bought mostly fluff--very little candy inflated with a lot of air.

The sad thing about it all is that many churches had rather have "fluff" than real spiritual food. As long as churches demand it, there will be those who are willing to be paid to spin it out for them.

Sermons and classes with real doctrinal content are held in disfavor by many of today's churches. The demand is for more "relevant"(?) matters. Themes more suited for psychologists and sociologists are replacing basic Bible topics. Topics that address so-called "real problems" and "real life concerns" of "today's Christian" are replacing those that deal with what the Book says about man's basic spiritual problem, sin; and his real basic needs--conviction of sin and the salvation of his soul. Lectures aimed more at enhancing man's present happiness and welfare than ensuring his eternal well-being are by far the most widely received. Preachers that entertain and make brethren feel good about themselves, rather than producing godly sorrow leading to repentance or any real depth of scriptural knowledge, are given the most favored status among brethren. Sermons that really teach the Bible are considered, "uninteresting", "too-structured" and even "crude" by some. All too often preachers who resort to such are asked to find someplace else to do their preaching. We have observed a rash of this lately.

Subjects more suitable for a civic club seminar than for a gospel meeting are commonly announced. Sunday after Sunday, if what I hear is accurate, talks that would be welcomed in any denominational church in town are passed off as gospel sermons. Unfortunately, as the title of the old country song put it, *"What Lola Wants Lola Gets?"*

So, all too often, preachers and elders bow to the pressure of those who want this "fluff." We know a good preacher, who is capable of making Bible studies interesting, who began a study of Isaiah (with its emphasis on the Messianic prophecies) for a college-age class. There was so much opposition to it by some members of the class that the elders saw fit to set up an alternate

class--so that those who wanted to could study something more "interesting" and "relevant." As my daddy used to say, "Now isn't that a pretty come off?"

A congregation constantly fed on "fluff" will not develop an appetite for sound doctrine. Any who may have had an appetite will soon lose it. Without a desire for sound doctrine churches are vulnerable to all kinds of fables.

Neither motivational hype nor emotional manipulation is gospel preaching. Such may produce increased activity of a sort. It may even build and inspire audiences after a fashion. It may enhance the speaker's standing with brethren as a dynamic speaker. But, it will not produce a well-grounded faith based upon a "thus saith the Lord."

Brethren, our preaching must follow the pattern that Paul outlined to Timothy. In form, it must have a well-rounded combination of convincing (reproving--KJV), rebuking and exhorting (or encouraging). In substance, it must have teaching (doctrine) at the base. It is no accident that Paul, in the preceding chapter, shows the Scriptures to be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (**2 Tim. 3:16**).

Book, chapter, and verse preaching/teaching that quotes or reads scriptures and then makes clear applications of the reading seldom sweeps folks along on clouds of ecstasy. Nor does it flow quite as smoothly as Dale Carnegie trained orations. Nor is it likely to make folks jump up and down with uncontrollable joy nor roll in the aisles with laughter. It will likely cause them to mostly sit and ponder on the validity of the message--comparing it with the Scriptures before them. Once convicted of the validity of the message, they will then be motivated to act with both an intelligent and emotional response to the great message preached. They are then moved by the power of the gospel preached more than the charismatic personal power of the preacher/teacher or dynamic qualities of his delivery.

We need preachers who will preach it just like Paul and other inspired men wrote it, preachers who will preach the word in season and out, without regard to whether churches will endure and support it.

We need churches that not only *endure* sound doctrine, but **demand** it of those they support in local work, in gospel meetings and throughout the world. Unless we have this we will continue seeing churches slide toward religious error and philosophical foolishness and away from the sound doctrine based on "what saith the Scriptures."