

HOW PREACHERS BACKSLIDE.

By Rev. E. E. Shelhamer.

Be it far from the writer to pose as a critic or as an example to ministers, but having lived forty and eight years, he has experienced and observed a few things. With Charles G. Finney, we are convinced that the greater responsibility lies with the ministry. If preachers keep right, the people will generally get right. There are various ways in which a minister may become a reprobate but we will speak now of only two.

1. Selling Out.

This pertains especially to young ministers. With a young man the paramount thought is, or should be—how to succeed. This is right, but is not without its dangers. The very nature of the desire may lead him unawares to spurn as a non-essential, some unpopular, yet vital truth that might be for his making.

Many a man has never been heard from, who ought to have aroused three worlds, simply because he was afraid to express and follow a God-given conviction. We fear there are multitudes of preachers who have failed to be and therefore to accomplish all that God had in mind for them, because they were more concerned about being "safe" and "representative men," than soul winners. It is sad to see young preachers bow and scrape before ecclesiastical diplomats in order to get a little recognition.

Some of the great religious gatherings and conventions remind a keen observer of a political caucus where underlings fawn and coo to the strut of the "higher-ups." To one who is dead to all things but God, the scene is heart sickening.

The average young preacher is on the market with eyes and ears open for anything that will give him prestige. If he can only get his name or picture before the public, surely this will advance him. And should he be received favorably, he feeds upon compliments with more relish than he does the precious Word. He feels more at home in public than upon his knees with an open Bible. He is more intent on studying how to be "original" or pleasing in appearance than on being deeply pious. He knows not the value of solitude, nor the full meaning of detachment. What a pity! If he only knew how to tarry until purified from all fleshly curiosity and self-recollection he would then be on the true road to success.

No doubt the devil watches and takes great delight when a young preacher spends more time planning on how to climb than on how to sink. For remember, when one grows faster than he ripens, he is making himself an easy prey for the devil. The higher he climbs, the more ruinous the consequences when he falls. "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

II. Self-Sufficiency.

The yielding to a self-important air is another way ministers lose out. This pertains more especially to old men. They have had much experience and can speak with authority. Good as this may be they are not yet out of gun-shot of the devil.

The very fact that a man has succeeded more or less, may lead to his everlasting undoing. His reputation may become his

ruination. This was what defeated Samson. "And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him." Here was a mighty man (and not the only one) who lost out unconsciously; and not until in the midst of a crucial test did he awake to the fact that he was shorn of his strength.

It is so easy to feel increased in goods and "in need of nothing." But this was what led Christ to spue the Laodiceans out of His mouth. When a minister begins to look wise, become critical and lean back upon his acquired ability, his spirituality is at an end. True, he may preach "masterly" discourses and fill important positions in the church, but the moment he feels satisfied with present attainments he has reached his zenith as a soul-winner.

Oh, brethren, let us remember that when we cease to get men to God we ourselves are wretched failures, regardless of all other qualifications.

Many a preacher's history could be written with two words—arrested development. Somewhere, somehow, he ceased growing in Christ-likeness. He ceased to prevail in prayer for souls. He ceased getting new revelations from the skies. When these things come to pass, what does it amount to if he has a great mind and a commanding appearance? There are thousands of preachers now gnashing their teeth in hell who also made a fair show in the flesh!

How sad when one awakes to the fact that he is becoming a success and because of it feels his ability and superiority! No doubt the devil waited long to behold this in some men, and when it once became a fact he rejoiced with as much fiendish delight as when, after a lapse of ten years the same man fell into open disgrace. Satan well knew that the outward act could not become an awful fact, until there was first a leakage within.

One of the saddest pictures of which we can conceive, is a preacher who has stepped down from his high and holy calling of winning souls and is now going about scolding and scheming over earthly things.

Another sad picture is an old, know-it-all minister, who has not been broken up over lost souls for a long time, but who is now nursing his hurt feelings because someone did not treat him right. It is too bad. The very fact that he feels "hurt" over a little thing proves that he has a small soul and is not worthy of the confidence and respect of others. It also proves that he has lost the peace of God, for we read, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them." Yes, nothing!

Oh, that this dear old backslider in heart could only see that when he allows himself to become "sore," he is as responsible as the one who creates the offence! Oh, that he could break down and get cured of his touchiness!

No doubt the reason some men notice little slights and inattentions so readily is that they have too high an estimate of their worth. In their younger days they took these things as a matter of discipline, but later they reached that dangerous period of self-inflation when it is easy to explode. They have evidently never learned, or have

forgotten Wesley's advice: "Let all that you think, or say, or do, prove that you are mean and little and vile and base in your own eyes." If one has really become so in your own eyes, he will not feel hurt if others come to the same conclusion.

It seems that most preachers have a certain limit to their growth and effectiveness, after which they either go to seed and die with the dry rot, or go into oblivion under a cloud of disgrace. It is too bad that many of them, like King Hezekiah, live about fifteen years too long, during which time they tear down what they labored hard to build.

It might be well to pray: Good Lord, let me live as long as I can do good good—especially more good than harm. But when Thou dost see that because of infirmities or inconsistencies I am no longer an asset to Thy cause, please take me to heaven quickly, I ask in Jesus' name. Amen!—Pentecostal Herald.

DECEIVING THE VERY ELECT.

In this day of fads, notions, modifications of doctrine and heresies of every kind, we can not be too careful as to what we believe and whom we endorse. We have come to the time when all sorts of notions and sentiments are injected into the holiness movement itself. It makes us think of a man going to a drug store and asking for a choice prescription and being told by the proprietor that he is out of that but has something else just as good. People are trying to deceive the holiness people in many places with something that is "just as good," and in many instances are succeeding.

One of the most common instances is the causing of some to believe that, because a preacher teaches a second work of grace, therefore he is a holiness preacher, when many times he does not believe in the death of the old man at all, but only teaches the Keswick doctrine of power for service as a second work. The real holiness people meet so much opposition and are so anxious to find a preacher that agrees with their position that some of them accept a good deal that is not holiness, because a second work of some kind is taught.

The proper test of holiness doctrine is its treatment of the sin question and not its epochal features. We can set it down as a fact that the elimination of sin is not a popular doctrine and never will be until the time of the New Jerusalem, and a preacher who has the favor of the carnal mind is not preaching holiness after the Wesleyan order.

The heavenly arithmetic is that you add by subtracting and multiply by dividing. So the physics of heaven teach us that if we would permeate a people with religion we must begin with the bottom, not with the top. The logic of heaven proves that persecution and other things which men say will kill a religion are the very things that makes it live and grow.—Bishop W. F. Oldham.

There is no "no man's land" in our Souls, it is all God's, or the devil will occupy it.—Harry Loomer.