

## HINDRANCES . . . IN PULPIT AND PEW

By Rev. J. B. Rowell

Internal ills are often more serious than those external, even as internal foes are far more to be feared than those on the outside. Ancient history, or legend, tells of the City of Troy under assault by the Greeks who had succeeded in driving the Trojans and their allies within the city. Some of the bravest of the Greek heroes concealed themselves in a large, hollow, wooden horse, while the Greek forces feigned retreat to their ships. Believing the siege ended, the Trojans without suspicion of the danger, dragged the wooden horse within the city and gave themselves to feasting and revelry. While the Trojans ceased to watch, the Greeks came forth from their hiding place and opened up the gates of the city, which was soon overrun by the Greek forces. Thus the Trojan horse, with the concealed few, did more to overthrow the city than the powerful army on the outside.

If the Church of Jesus Christ would remain secure against the assaults of Satan, she must ever be on guard against the intrusion of hell's fifth column tactics. Once the enemy of Christ's cause finds entrance into the ranks of the saints, he, with malign intent, seeks to overthrow the citadel from within, with the fell purpose of breaking down all spiritual resistance.

Satan is more to be dreaded when he comes as an angel of light than when he attacks as a roaring lion. He comes in religious garb, and offers an easier, but a bloodless, religion; a religion assuming a wisdom superior to that of the incarnate God, with a denial of the miraculous, as evidenced in the virgin birth and in the literal, physical resurrection of our Lord. Hence, Modernism found ready acceptance on the part of multitudes.

Satan also introduced a religion accommodated to the desires of the flesh and a possible popularity in a world estranged from God. Thus the godless admixture of worldliness has been admitted into many churches, with the result that the distinctive marks of Christianity are no longer in evidence, being lost in a false liberty.

In this most subtle undermining of the cause of Christ, both pulpit and pew, in many quarters, have been in guilty agreement. Many religious leaders have wickedly compromised with eternal verities, and sold their high office to the demon imitator and manipulator of religious worship and service. Undoubtedly, there are those who have not wisely weighed the issues and, consequently, do not realize all the serious spiritual implications in their departures from the truth and the will of God. This aspect is given in telling terms in Holy Scripture:

"There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravaging the prey; they have devoured souls. \* \* \* Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things; they have put on difference between the holy and profane. \* \* \* Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravaging the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression \* \* \* yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully"

(Ezekiel 22:25-31).

Here is a lamentable description of prophets, priests, princes, and people standing guilty before God—guilty in a great, though perhaps unwitting, conspiracy against God, inspired and energized by the devil.

Thank God, this word is still true, "Behold, the Lord's hand it not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear" (Isa. 59:1).

## Hindrances in the Pulpit

Wesley once said, "There are some men who preach so well when in the pulpit that it is a shame they should ever come out of it; and when they are out of it, they live so ill that it is a shame that they should ever enter it." It must have been something akin to this which constrained the saintly Richard Baxter to warn ministers:

"Take heed to yourselves, because there are many eyes upon you, and there will be many to observe your falls. You cannot miscarry but the world will ring of it. The eclipses of the sun by day are seldom without witnesses. As you take yourselves for the lights of the churches, you may expect that other men's eyes will be upon you. If other men can sin without observation, so **cannot** you." (The Reformed Pastor, p. 51).

Our message may be as sound and as fundamental and as scriptural as it is possible for a message to be, but if our lives are not in accord with the message, then we do vastly more harm than we can ever do good. Richard Baxter clothed his thought in expressive terms when he said:

"Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine \* \* \* lest you unsay with your lives what you say with your tongues, and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors. It much hindereth our work when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public, because we cannot be at hand to expose their folly; but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after, pull down with your hands! This is the way to make men think that the Word of God is but an idle tale, and to make preaching seem no better than prating. He that **means** as he speaks, will surely **do** as he speaks" (Ibid. p. 33).

Where preaching is naught but a profession to gain a livelihood, there can be no sense of conviction, or of convicting power. Where the preacher is not enjoying victory in his own soul, he can seldom be a channel of blessing and victory to others. It is possible to have a prepared message, faultless in its homiletical arrangement, without the heart being prepared before God, and by the Holy Spirit. There may be much fervor in the delivery of such a message, but that fervor may be like just so much slush on an iceberg, the inner man unmoved or persuaded by words which are but utterances of the lips. Baxter warned: "If you have an affected fervency, you cannot expect a blessing to attend it from on high."

A spirit reacting to the spirits of men, rather than to the Spirit of God, is likely to be often dispirited. Pride of heart may keep the ear open to hear what the people say, rather than that the inner ear shall hear what God has to say. The Psalmist declared, "I will hear

God the Lord will speak" (Psa. 85:8).

## Heart Grief Through Slander

Criticizing faithful brethren in the ministry is a subtle work. Many a true servant of God has had his effectiveness crippled, his name and reputation tarnished because of the sly gossip of some self-seeking brother. It is the work of Satan to undermine a man and his work by insinuating a groundless suspicion into the minds of others; and he has often used Christian ministers to do this wicked work. It is easier to belittle the good a man is doing than to do the same amount of good. How many Christian ministers and workers are living under a handicap, because blighted by someone's lie, or half-truth! Seldom has the slandered person a chance to speak for himself. Many times a slanderer has dropped his seed of untruth or criticism, gone his way, and left that seed to produce a harvest to the glory of the devil, and to the detriment of the cause of Christ. And how easy it is to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit, and destroy the fruitfulness of a minister's message by faint praise. Alexander Pope, the English poet, spoke, two hundred years ago, of those who "damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer, and without sneering, teach the rest to sneer."

How much better to be liberal in appreciation of our brother's worth, to give emphasis to his fine qualities and to cover a fault, to the glory of God!

## Hindrances in the Pew

All the responsibility for the spiritual success of a church service does not rest upon the minister, but must be shared by the people. Non-separation from the world, and the consequent lack of spirituality, is a great hindrance. Revival seems impossible in some churches, because of unsanctified Christians. Such unsanctified Christians create an atmosphere that constitutes a resistance against the preacher and his message. Their worldly, critical, fault-finding **thoughts** build up a barrier of opposition against the spiritually minded; and thus the non-spiritual warfare against the spiritual, the one energized by Satan, and the other, by the Holy Spirit. Even Christians can lend their aid to Satan by their critical or prayerless condition.

The writer well remembers a faithful, God-fearing minister of the Gospel, telling how he sought the Lord in prayer, and went to the service filled with the joy of the Lord; but when he stood up to preach, it seemed as though some spiritual power had thrown a wet blanket over him, the power of resistance was so strong. Oftentimes the members of a congregation do not realize what a battle, what opposition, the preacher is experiencing in his own soul—such opposition operating in and through the minds and mental attitude of those who should be bearing him up in prayer.

Then there are the worldly, selfish Christians who spend their energy in their own interests, and have nothing to give in the service of the Lord—no vital prayer support. It is possible for the people to fail, or withhold, in the matter of prayerful co-operation, and then blame the pastor for lack of results, when they themselves are the stumbling blocks. It is recorded concerning our Lord's ministry in Nazareth, "And he could there do no mighty work" (Mark 6:5-6). "And he did

(Continued on Page 8)