

Perils of the Ministry

The perilous times in which we live suggest this subject. The Bible tells us: "In the last days perilous times shall come." We wonder sometimes what will be the outcome of it all. There are so many more things now to try men's souls than there were when we started out.

Then and Now: A Contrast

In the early stages of Christian experience men battled against many things that have ceased to be a battle. We have now passed to more dangerous grounds. Tobacco, gambling, dancing, cursing and drinking are not temptations to holiness ministers, although they are a menace to our country.

Let us notice a few of the things that are present perils of the ministry. The dictionary defines peril as, exposure to injury, danger, and risk. Therefore, it would be well to weigh things in the light of this definition.

One Peril to Fear

Some gospel ministers are afraid to preach the truth in all its fullness. Others are afraid to stand out against the popular sins of the day. I saw a cartoon of a preacher taking over a new charge. The members were gathered around him. One was saying, "Do not preach against pride and worldliness." Another, "Do not say anything against dancing." Another, "Do not preach against tobacco." And so on, down the catalog. The poor fellow looked scared. He asked, "What can I preach against?" One solved the problem by saying, "Preach about the Jews; there are none of them in this town." "Fear hath torments." Fear made great men cowards. God says, "Fear not their faces." "Be strong and courageous."

The Danger of Compromise

This danger is caused by fear. We might lower our standards and grow big. It is good to grow if we can grow and maintain our position on the line of our moral standards. The only reason we can offer for our existence is that God thrust us out to preach holiness.

Harshness and Bitterness of Spirit

It is a sad day when one becomes sour on the church, or the pastor, or the world. The minister must obey the divine injunction, "Preach the truth in love." Most people judge you by what you are, more than by what you say. If you must use the sword, let it be like the one described in Isaiah 34:5, "bathed in heaven." Then you can cut and heal at the same time. When one sours in spirit, he becomes a grumbler and a source of fermentation.

Doubting Christ's Deity

There is great danger of putting a question mark against the deity of Jesus. He is a good man! Yes, but He is more than a good man! He is "God manifest in the flesh." The preacher should be careful what he reads nowadays. You can undermine your faith unconsciously by reading things that are not sound. Some say they read them to know how to meet the arguments. But there is a better way. Read the Bible! Truth counteracts error. "Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

PASTORAL VISITING

W. Graham Scroggie, a veteran British churchman, says in a recent article for preachers that some so-called "pastoral visiting" is nothing but "pious loafing." It consists, he says, mainly of tea drinking and general gossip.

That rather sharp arrow was followed with a helpful discussion of pastoral visiting, in which Dr. Scroggie lists the people who especially need the counsel of a pastor's visit.

"In most congregations there are young people with genuine doubts and difficulties; there are others who are overburdened; and there are businessmen who are having a hard time of it. There are also people who are ill; some who are about to leave home and embark on a career abroad; and others who are carrying some wearing sorrow.

"Also there are young lovers who, if you have their confidence, will appreciate your interest and counsel. Perhaps there are those who have fallen into sin, and are contemplating leaving the church altogether. And there are men and women too old to come to the public worship, who nevertheless love the church and who would much like to see the minister.

"These, and such like, are the pastor's care"

—Clipped

Majoring on Negatives

There is the danger of one's preaching too much on the negative side. Do not talk so much about what the truth is not, but what it is. If people accept the truth it unties the knots.

Laziness

There is the danger of laziness. It ought not to have to be mentioned, but it exists in the ministry.

Carelessness

There is also the danger of carelessness. Some are careless about their appearance; others are careless about the church, and some neglect the sick among them. Some preachers can stay on a charge for several years and never visit all the members.

Neglect of Study

Furthermore, there is a danger of neglecting one's hours of study, which leads one to depend on some old sermon. Samson used the jawbone once, with success; but trusted it again and failed!

Praying is hard work, but we must do it if we are to avoid an unctionless ministry.

"His sermon had the usual heads,

And subdivisions fine;

The language was as delicate

And graceful as a vine.

"It had its proper opening,

'Twas polished, as a whole,

It had but one supreme defect—

It failed to reach the soul."

—Exchange in the Church Herald

A CHURCH EXISTS FOR THE DOUBLE PURPOSE OF GATHERING IN AND SENDING OUT.—Clipped.

Pastor and Missions

How interesting it is to see a church change, in a few months, from a church indifferent to the missionary challenge to one on fire for missions, when there is a change of pastors. Such a condition can be attributed to leadership alone. The apathy and indifference to missions in such a church could not be credited to local church conditions or to conditions in the missionary work, but must rest with the pastor. As a rule, all local congregations crave leadership, or they would not call a pastor; and they will follow a strong, intelligent and constructive leadership.

It is tragic to see young men launched into ministerial life with no conception of its responsibilities, other than the preaching of a well-constructed homiletical sermon. As good and necessary as that is, it is far from being his primary task. His primary task is to "Go . . . and make disciples of all nations." To do that he must have a vision that reaches beyond his own pulpit ability, his own church belfry, his own conference and his own nation. He must be, and he must lead his church to be, a witness to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8), either in person or by proxy, or he has robbed his church of that stimulating, spiritual enrichment which always attends sacrificial effort to aid others. He has robbed heaven of souls that might have been saved for all eternity, and he has deepened the sorrows of hell by neglecting to let the light of his church shine as far as God wants to let it shine into the dark corners of the earth.

He needs to learn that the church which lets its light shine farthest into the darkness is the church whose light will shine brightest at home. He needs to learn, once and forever, that a church taught to close its affections of mercy for its brothers who are in need of the gospel will eventually close its heart to all sacrificial giving, and finally atrophy and die in cold, financial calculations. He has failed in the primary objective of his calling.

His failure to face the missionary challenge squarely and personally, his unwillingness to investigate its divine origin, its Biblical basis and its God-favored accomplishments, and his ignorantly opposing and neglecting missions on the basis of local conditions, unfavorable selfish comments or the mistakes of missionary endeavor, will not excuse him. He must, with a missionary compassion, inject missions into his private and public praying, into his ministry and into his leadership as a pastor, or fail Jesus Christ, whose last thought was embodied in the great commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and in Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

A pastor who cannot lead his church in a missionary direction and beget in them a zeal for missionary endeavor may well consider himself a failure as a church leader. He has robbed himself of that peculiar blessing embodied in the words of Jesus: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age (R.V.)" For that is for only those who "go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel."

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