

PAUL'S EXHORTATION.

"I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ...preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine....Be thou sober in all things; suffer bad treatment; perform an evangelist's work; fully accomplish thy service." (2 Tim. 4:1,2,5, Diaglott and Common Tran.)

We have heretofore seen that the commission to preach the good tidings comes to all the anointed company – the body of Christ – and that for this very purpose we have received the anointing. That which was true of the Head is also true of the whole body – "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach." (Isa. 61:1.)

But while we who are consecrated and anointed realize that we are thus called of God to preach, it is of very great importance that we consider well what, when, how, where, and to whom, we may preach.

It is a great mistake, and yet a very common one, to go out to preach before being sent. Such, of course, cannot and do not preach the good tidings. Some presume that because Paul said, reprove, rebuke, and exhort, that must be the bulk and substance of their preaching, forgetting that he also said, "With all long-suffering (patience) and doctrine." Reproof or rebuke may sometimes be necessary, but it should never be administered merely according to our own whims or imaginations, but should in every instance be "with doctrine" – with sound and scriptural reasoning – that it may be recognized as a reproof from the Lord, though administered through the agency of a brother with brotherly patience, and not

with an arrogance which forgets that we are subject to similar temptations.

Exhortation may also be necessary, but should never degenerate into mere coaxing without sound reason or doctrine. Exhortation without sound reasoning and the strong support of the inspired Word is weak and is not lasting in its effects. This is the method of preaching most common at the present day, but was never indulged in by our Lord. Of him it was said, "He shall not cry nor call aloud, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets." Isa. 42:2 – Leeser. His preaching, and that of his disciples, was reasonable, doctrinal, and was delivered with the dignity and meekness becoming to Jehovah's ambassadors.

Let us inquire, then,

WHAT ARE WE CALLED TO PREACH?

Paul answers, "Preach the Word," and Isaiah and Jesus call it "good tidings." Before we begin to preach, therefore, we should first be acquainted with the Word and have a clear, definite understanding of its "good tidings." Although as soon as we were anointed, we were called to preach, the Lord would not have us engage in such service until first we have received sufficient instruction. The first duty, then, of every one who would obey the call to preach is to become an earnest, faithful, diligent student of God's Word, that he may be able to minister grace to the hearer, having his speech seasoned with salt." (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6.)

You may be called to preach some time before you are sent out into active service. Jesus was "anointed to preach" at the time of his baptism, but he was not sent out until after he had endured the wilderness temptation. The early disciples were called, but were told to tarry until endued with power. For a special purpose in the introduction of the gospel, the power came upon the early church

suddenly and miraculously as soon as they received the anointing, but this has not been the case with the church since then. Power in presenting the truth comes now to the anointed as the reward of diligent study of the Word.

To many study is distasteful; they have not been accustomed to it, and are not willing to give it the necessary time and labor, yet they want to obey the call to preach, and so they go forth to add to the general confusion of unintelligible preaching, and their work brings reproach and dishonor both upon themselves and upon the cause of Christ. The bearing of such reproach may be for Christ's sake, but it is not to Christ's glory, and the loss is the result of imprudence, and of not heeding the injunction, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Tim. 2:15.

Truth, rightly divided, and fairly presented, commands the respect even of its opponents. Its symmetry and beauty will irresistibly stamp itself upon the mind. Thus it was in the case of Jesus' preaching, when the very men that were commissioned to lay hands on him and deliver him to death returned, saying, "Never man spake like this man." (John 7:46.) So also Festus said to Paul, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." "No," said Paul, with becoming dignity and due deference to the powers that be, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things before whom I speak freely.... King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, 'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.' And Paul said, I would to God that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." And the verdict of these unbelievers, in Paul's case, was, "This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds." (Acts 26:24-31.)

Paul's eloquence was the eloquence of truth – the result of a thorough understanding and conviction of the truth, which carried force and commanded the respect of even its enemies. He was a diligent student as well as a preacher, and his hearers could not say, Paul, you don't know what you are talking about, nor turn with disgust from the sound of empty words.

When Jesus our great example went out to preach – to teach – the people listened with astonishment, and said "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" (Matt. 13:54.) And thus it is to some extent with all who follow in his footsteps. Acts 4:13.

Some zealous brother or sister may ask, How long must I tarry for preparation? and how shall I know when the Lord sends me out? To this we reply that when the Lord sends you out you will be sure to know it. You will be so filled with the knowledge of the truth, and so inspired by it that out of the abundance of your heart your mouth must speak. The good tidings will be too good to keep. You will not have all the truth God intends for you before you are sent out, but you will have a clear, definite outline at least. Just how long a time of preparation you will require will depend on circumstances – the amount of time you can devote to study, the degree of effort with which you undertake it, the faith and simplicity in which you receive it, etc. Some may be ready for active service sooner than others, but all require a considerable time for previous preparation.

But even when permitted to engage in active service, we should bear in mind the fact that we are to be constant students. To preach the Word, the good tidings, is our commission, and which of us can yet say, we have sounded all its depths, and measured all its heights, and have therefore nothing more to learn? To have a general outline of God's plan mapped out in our minds is very good, but we should have its various features so clearly fixed as to be able to show it to another; therefore review is very necessary.

When thus prepared and sent out to preach (and be assured you are not yet sent if you are not prepared,) Paul says, "Be instant in season" and "out of season." Does he mean to have us pay no attention to fitting and appropriate times? No, for that would be contrary to the Lord's teaching – "Be ye wise as serpents [R647 : page 2] and harmless as doves" – as well as to his own example. He must mean, then, to have no regard to our own convenience or inconvenience, but to be always ready to preach when we find fitting opportunity.

Injudicious breaking in upon the plans of others to teach them what we deem to be of importance, but which they do not yet so recognize, is almost sure to defeat our purpose and to engender prejudice and opposition which is not soon nor easily overcome.

Paul further enjoins that we be sober in all things; that is, that we handle the truth with becoming reverence and humility, living as examples of its influence, not carried away with excitement or self-exaltation, and that we patiently suffer bad treatment, which we should expect from those who love darkness rather than light, although measurably they secretly recognize the light we bring.

In view of the preparation necessary, none need be discouraged or despair of ever being sent out to preach. You may never be sent to speak to a public audience. God uses us according to the human talent we possess. Paul, Peter and others could preach publicly, but Aquila and Priscilla unable to preach in a public way to the many, could invite an Apollos to their home and explain to him the way of God more perfectly. And the devoted and eloquent Apollos, thus more perfectly prepared, went out to declare it publicly. (Acts 18:2,26.) Had Aquila and Priscilla not been students of the truth, what an opportunity they would have lost.

May the Lord's blessing rest upon all the preachers of the good tidings, whether in a wide or in a seeming narrow sphere; but let us

not forget the fitting counsel, "Study to show thyself a workman approved unto God rightly dividing the word of truth." And be assured that when prepared, you will surely be sent to preach it to at least some one.
