

## SEASONING A SERMON

The use of salt, pepper, spices and other seasonings in proper proportions and in appropriate applications makes food pleasing to the palate. But what tastes good to one person may not appeal to another. Regardless how good a chef may be, and how painstaking his efforts to please the masses, there will always be someone who doesn't like his recipe. There are people who make their living as food critics. What a job!

I wish to draw a parallel here to the crafting and delivery of a sermon. What appeals to one may not please another. Now, we are not talking here about changing the recipe. The gospel is not to be compromised! What we are addressing is the way its presentation is seasoned.

Paul asked the Colossian Christians (4:4-6) to pray that he may proclaim the mystery of Christ clearly, as he should. He instructed Christians, "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

In our discourse with the lost, we must take advantage of every opportunity to inject the message of the gospel, to the end that souls will be preserved for eternity in God's presence. According to Paul (Eph. 6:19,20), this discourse needs to be characterized by boldness.

This is not going to be palatable to everyone. Paul said (1 Cor. 1:18) that there will be some who are offended by the message of the cross, yet the cross is at the foundation of the message of grace. You can't preach about grace without emphasizing man's lost condition, Christ's sacrifice, and man's sacrificial response.

Paul instructed Timothy (2 Tim. 4:2) that his preaching should include reproof, rebuke, and exhortation with great patience and instruction. Then he explains why. "For," he says, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths." Who can deny that we live in that day?

Paul was disappointed in the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor. 3:2) because they were not able to digest solid food, but were still existing on a diet

of milk. Paul assigns the problem to their fleshly nature. It is sad, indeed, when people, who have been Christians for many years, are offended when the preacher serves the meaty entree of the Gospel. But the preacher should not be criticized, nor should he take this personally when people quit coming to the table. For Jesus and the apostles had the same experience in response to their preaching (cf. John 6:66).

A child will turn up his nose to certain foods which are needed for a balanced diet. Loving parents, however, will not allow the child to exist on junk food.

There are Biblical doctrines over which men engage in strong controversy. Some would suggest that we remove those from our preaching menu. Others would pressure us to so season it so as to disguise it enough to make it palatable.

As for me, I want to stand in the final day alongside Paul, who, in addressing the Elders from Ephesus, said, "I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose [counsel, will] of God" (Acts 20:26-27). Then he immediately issues the warning about false teachers infiltrating the flock, and charges the Elders to guard the flock from these savage wolves.

Consider the preaching of the apostles. How did they season their sermons? Did they subscribe to the adage that says you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar? Now, don't misunderstand. Neither the apostles nor I deliberately say or do anything to irritate people or turn them away. But can we say that the apostles' sermons were candy-coated pop-psychology that was designed to make people feel good and comfortable? Were they into peripheral topics that people felt were relevant, or did they approach people directly with the reality of their lost condition followed by the Way (John 14:6) to be saved?

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), did Peter dance around the issues for fear that his audience may be offended by the cold, hard truth? Not at all! He basically charged the gathered Jews with murder! And that of the Messiah!! How do you suppose that would preach today? The result of Peter's sermon is recorded in verse 37. The people were smitten in conscience and cried out for the remedy to their sin. And over 3,000 souls were added to the Lord that day!

As a result of their continued preaching,

the number of men in the fledgling church grew to 5,000. And the church multiplied in numbers!

Paul's sermon before Felix concerned righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come (Acts 24:25). Felix's response was that of postponement to a more convenient time. This is hardly a popular theme in today's preaching, either. Yet, such follows apostolic example.

Peter and John shared Paul's dedication to preaching the complete Gospel message. After healing the lame man (Acts 3), they were hauled in before the council, which commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). A genuine minister of God, when pressured to withhold part of the gospel message, will reply with Peter and John, saying, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard" (v. 19-20).

When the Jews at Corinth resisted and blasphemed, Paul shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads! I am clean" (Acts 18:6). What kind of seasoning is that?

How, then, should a sermon be seasoned? First, we must be careful to serve a well-balanced meal. Man cannot live on milk alone! Our spiritual diet must contain some roughage and fiber along with the dessert. We cannot pander to the fleshly nature that feels only a need for the dessert if we want a strong, healthy body.

The sermon should be seasoned with grace and truth. There are times when the sermon should be seasoned with boldness, for this is how we ought to speak, according to Paul. It should also be seasoned with great patience and instruction.

The fact that there are babies at the table should not dictate that everyone be restricted to a diet of formula. When the family comes to The Table should be a time when the preacher may speak words that would be difficult for a baby to digest. The babies are best fed in private, which is why there needs to be more emphasis placed upon Bible classes and home studies that are geared more effectively to specific levels of learning.

The pressures and expectations of the pulpit are so numerous and diverse in modern church culture to do anyone much good. A diet of milk spells malnourishment. A comprehensive diet of meat is more than some can tolerate.