

**Old Union Ministers' School
2007 Session**

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The Whole Counsel of God

Or

Shrinking Preachers

Reading lesson: Acts 20:26-32
Paul's farewell sermon to the elders of Ephesus

Lesson text: Acts 20:27
"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

I. The Counsel of God

A. Definition: "Counsel"; Greek origin is "**boule**" (boo-lay'); Strong's #1012;
All the contents of the divine plan.

This divine plan--the revealed will of God in His gospel--contains everything that has any tendency to promote the glory of God and the good of souls. (Gill)

B. Text: Acts 20:27 (KJV)

1. Various translations of our text

- a. American Standard Bible:** *"For I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God."*
- b. New American Standard:** *"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."*
- c. Weymouth Bible:** *"For I have not shrunk from declaring to you God's whole truth."*
- d. English Standard Bible:** *"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."*

2. Text analysis: Paul's intent regarding "all the counsel of God"

- a. **Pure:** Nothing but the counsel of God, having not added any inventions of his own.
- b. **Entire:** The complete counsel of God; lacking no components
- c. **Bold:** He had not shrunk away from parts of God's counsel

Persons giving testimony in our courts of law, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Paul was testifying to the elders at Ephesus that he had not, for any personal reasons, held back from preaching the most difficult parts of the gospel. He had not shunned preaching those truths which he knew would be provoking to the watchful enemies of Christianity or displeasing to the careless professors of it.

C. Implications

1. Responsibility of God's messengers

- a. Watchmen--**Ezekiel 33:6** *But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take any person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand.*

Matthew Henry "The blood of he that perishes by the sword of the enemy will be required of the watchman who did not sound the warning!"

- b. Stewards--**I Peter 4:10** *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

I Corinthians 4:2 *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

Stewards have all the responsibility and no ownership.

2. Accountability of God's messengers

- a. **Romans 14:12** *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*
Acts 20:28 *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*
I Peter 5:2 *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.*

A watchman / steward is relieved of his post if he fails to fulfill the appointed duties. He may be charged with negligence or dereliction of duty and punished. He may also be censored for ineptitude or incompetence.

3. Reception of God's messengers

a. Rejected in the Old Testament

Jeremiah 6:17 *Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.*

Ezekiel 33:9 *Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity.*

b. Rejected in the New Testament

Luke 7:29-30 *"And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him."*

c. Rejected today

II Timothy 4:2-5 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."*

Many hearers of today are happy with bits and pieces of the truth concerning the will of God, and they pick and choose which parts according to their personal sentiments and preferences.

Rejection of the message does not negate our obligation to preach it consistently and without apology. Our Lord expects us to follow His example of dealing with rejection and continuing as stewards of the gospel.

II. The Shrinking Preacher

A. How does a preacher "shrink"?

To shrink: a. *to decrease or cause to decrease in amount, extent, value or weight.*

b. *to be unwilling or reluctant to do something, especially something difficult or unpleasant.*

c. *to move back and away, especially out of disgust, fear or horror.*

Ministers are guilty of shrinking when we do not preach the whole counsel of God. We shrink as we dodge and avoid the difficult subjects of the Word and the unpleasant tasks of preaching and / or pastoring. The further we shrink, the less the Lord has to work with in our ministry.

B. The Temptation to Shrink

1. Our flesh desires it; it is easier.

2. Helps us avoid confrontation and rejection.

3. Reduces our study time and effort; allows us to concentrate on a few subjects.

4. May boost our popularity; more opportunities to preach.

All of this seems reasonable and prudent until we remember David's efforts to cover his sin with Bathsheba. He quickly found himself guilty of deceit, guile, and murder from an effort to conceal his original sin of adultery. As David settled into life with Bathsheba, all seemed well. Except for one detail...

II Samuel 11:27

"...But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Even if all men are seemingly pleased with us, we displease the Lord when we shrink away from His messages and truth. We have an obligation to please God before men.

C. Some Subjects from which we often Shrink

1. God's counsel on financial stewardship

a. Statistics: (sources: creditcards.com and Social Security Adm.)

- Americans average credit card debt is \$11,840 per household
- Total American consumer debt was \$1 trillion in 1994; by 2005, it was \$2.2 trillion
- 7 of every 10 Americans admit to using credit cards in place of savings
- 96% of Americans will have to retire financially dependent upon government, family, or charity.
- 85 of every 100 Americans have saved less than \$25,000 by age 65.
- 25% of Americans saved nothing in the past year
- Last year, the average savings rate was NEGATIVE in America; meaning the average American spent more than he / she was paid last year!!

These statistics make it obvious that our land needs God's counsel on money.

b. Jesus and money

- 2,000 passages in the Bible deal directly or indirectly with money and possessions
- Jesus preached concerning or regarding the use of money more than any other subject
- Half of Jesus' parables utilize money in one form or another

There must be a great deal more than "*the love of money is the root of all evil*" to God's counsel on money. "*If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?*" **Luke 16:11**

How money is regarded, how it is earned, and how it is used are all parts of financial stewardship. They speak volumes about the steward's attitude toward God. Proper financial stewardship is God's will.

c. Proper handling of money

- Keep money in proper perspective--it is a tool to use for personal living and for God's service.

Matthew 6:33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

I Timothy 6:7-9 *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition."*

Ecclesiastes 5:19 *Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.*

- Exercise self-discipline in money matters.

Proverbs 13:18 *Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.*

- Do honorable work, pay your bills, pay your taxes, and provide for your household.

Proverbs 13:11 *Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.*

Romans 13:7 *Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.*

Proverbs 21:20 *There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.*

Proverbs 31:21 *She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.*

I Timothy 5:8 *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

- Give freely.

2 Corinthians 9:7, 8 *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

Ecclesiastes 5:11 *When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?*

The whole counsel of God includes preaching and teaching that God's will for us monetarily is that we are grateful for what we have, wise in how we use it and pleased when we can "freely give" that which we have been "freely given."

2. God's counsel on the family

a. God instituted the family--Genesis 2:8-25

b. Marriage is the foundation of a Christian family

- Both parties must be saved (not unequally yoked together)
- Marriages must be ordained and approved by God. No house is safe which has been built upon a shaky foundation!
- Marriages should be grounded and rooted in love: each partner to the Lord, each partner towards the other (**Ephesians 5:21-33 Colossians 3:18-19**), each partner towards the church and God's people, each partner toward the children, each partner toward neighbors and fellow man.

The U. S. Census Bureau stated in 2000 that:

- 11,000,000 people were co-habiting
- 41% of American women have co-habited
- # of co-habiting couple increased by 72% from 1990 to 2000
- 41% of unmarried partner households have children under 18 in them
- 33% of all births were to unmarried women
- 53% of marrying couples lived together first
- 25% of American homes consist as "traditional"; a married couple and their children

c. Marriage intended to be for life--**Matthew 19:4-6**

An article entitled, "Making Marriage Last" as published by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, listed these issues as the most commonly given reasons for failed marriages:

- Poor communication
- Financial problems
- Lack of commitment
- Differing priorities
- Infidelity
- Unmet needs
- Addictions
- Physical, sexual, or emotional abuse
- Lack of conflict resolution skills

A study conducted by Creighton University in 2001 found that young married couples cited time, sex, and money as the primary sources of problems in their marriages.

The younger generation is disgruntled with marriage as they were the first generation to grow up in an era where divorce was readily available and socially acceptable. Thus, more children than ever grow up in broken homes.

d. Children are a blessing to a home--**Psalms 127**

e. Discipline preserves the home.

- Self-discipline
- Discipline of children.
- Well-defined roles for family members.
- Obligations for each as established by God

The family is under tremendous strain and attack in America. The fact that Satan is attacking this institution should serve as proof of how much God values our families. We must clearly and consistently teach the families of our church / churches that we cannot live like everyone else and expect different results simply because we have been born again! Piety at home will result in the blessings God has reserved for the family unit.

The whole counsel of God includes preaching and teaching that it is God's will that our homes honor Him--that they are filled with mutual love and respect, and children are raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

3. God's counsel on sexual behavior

a. The seventh commandment--**Exodus 20:14**

- No longer one flesh; destroys what God has joined together.

Hebrews 13:4

"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

b. Other sexual prohibitions--**Exodus 22, Romans 1:26, 27**

The seventh commandment forbids all violations of God's boundaries for our sexual behavior. The Bible illustrates what happens when we violate those boundaries:

1. Adultery: David / Bathsheba
2. Fornication: Solomon
3. Prostitution: **I Corinthians 10:6** / Temple of Aphrodite
4. Rape: David's daughter
5. Incest: Lot and his daughters
6. Homosexuality: Sodom / Gomorrah

From Leaderu.com:

- AIDS is the #1 killer of Americans age 25 to 44
- 68% of men and 59% of women admit to having sexual relations with at least one person of which their spouse is unaware

The whole counsel of God includes preaching and teaching the boundaries for sexual behavior as set forth in God's Word. It is God's will that we enjoy all the blessings of marriage; that we do not abuse those blessings and privileges.

4. God's counsel on other subjects

a. Evangelism--**Matthew 28:18-20**

- We must teach the church's obligation to evangelize.
- We must teach how to evangelize.
- We must also be examples in evangelism; doing the work of an evangelist.
- Hard-shell doctrine is the quickest and surest path to extinction.

b. Piety--Personal and Corporate

- Was once a hallmark of God's people.

c. The Teaching Ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ **Matthew 28:18-20**

- Teach (evangelize)
- Baptize (the converted)
- Teach for a lifetime (mature)

The whole counsel of God requires that we be "apt to teach." Apt does not refer to eagerness. Rather, it refers to ability. It is God's will that we be able and effective teachers. A willingly ignorant people will perish.

III. Results of Shrinking from the Whole Counsel of God

A. Preachers are not well-rounded.

II Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

IF...the entire word of God is profitable, won't God impress us to preach the entirety of His Word???

We did not have a say-so as to our calling into the ministry, and do not select our ministerial gifts.

Some desire to be spiritual evangelists and are matured into pragmatic pastors. Others desire the office of the bishop and are given talents of evangelism. Regardless of our particular gifts, we all have the obligation to preach God's whole counsel with the gifts He gives us.

We are to be well-rounded as individuals; "smoothed" all the way around.

- Half a tire is useless
- Half a lawnmower blade works very poorly
- Half a meal will not satiate your appetite

For the fullest effect, we must render the whole, completed product.

It becomes our duty, as ministers, to teach the entire word as He impresses us!

If we agree that all of God's Word is needful and necessary...why then do our sermons never cover some subjects and only rarely cover others?

Why do portions of His Holy Word remain silent in our churches? It is OUR responsibility to teach "The Whole Counsel of God"!

B. Saints are left vulnerable to sin.

Satan knows what truth has been neglected; knows where to attack to destroy the effectiveness of our witness.

C. World sees a distorted image of God.

God chooses to accomplish His work in the world through His people. What the world sees of God is the church. Preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God is as close as we can get to representing our perfect, holy God.

IV. Summary

A. We have been called to teach.

- We have been reactive as a people for years! God is proactive.
- We are to teach God's people to be progressive and proactive. The Holy Spirit is our leader, guide, comforter, etc. He is always proactive. Faith is proactive; sight is reactive

B. Our teaching will be judged, in part, by the knowledge our hearers obtain and practice.

C. We are stewards of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. We have been "dropping the ball" as a collective in some areas.

- If God's word is proactive and the Holy Spirit is proactive, God's churches should be proactive as well. Indeed, each individual Christian should be proactive within the authority of his / her local body of baptized believers.

E. It is crucial at this point in history, that we react properly to these areas of gross neglect and then proactively teach God's people how to be spiritually successful.

Anything less makes us **SHRINKING PREACHERS!**