

THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

BY REV. A. R. LOVE,

At the Baptist Church on Sunday Morning, October 11th.

"Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Acts 20:26-27.

A more beautiful and pathetic scene was never enacted upon land or sea than the one in which the words of our text were uttered.

Paul was returning from his third and last great missionary journey. On this journey he had endeavored to revisit the churches he established on his first and second journeys.

He had gone through Asia Minor, Macedonia and Achaia, or Greece, and was now on his return to Jerusalem, by way of Troas, the place where he saw the vision of the man from Macedonia on his second missionary journey.

Reaching Troas on his return, another strange thing occurred. Paul preached all night and Eutychus, a young man whose name means fortunate, went to sleep and fell down to the ground from a third story window. Everybody thought he was dead, but Paul went down and picked him up and declared life was still in him, and going back in to the third story, he continued his sermon until the break of day; and when the day had fully dawned, the boat he was to sail upon, started for Caesarea.

But Paul walked down the coast to Assos, a few miles away and the boat came to land and took him on.

For some reason they sailed by Ephesus, where Paul had spent about three years on his second journey, but landed at Miletus, thirty-six miles south of Ephesus.

At that time Miletus was on the coast but now it is ten miles inland, by the change in the coast-line. It is now a small town called Melos. Here the ship remained several days perhaps loading or unloading, or both; and Paul sent messengers up to Ephesus, thirty-six miles away, for the elders in the church to come down to Miletus, that he might see them and talk to them. They came; and no doubt many of the lay members came also.

There upon the coast of Miletus, Paul preached again to the church of Ephesus.

He began his sermon by saying,—"Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, with many tears and temptations (or trials) and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, and now behold I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things which shall befall me there, save that the holy spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me, but none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself; and now behold I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more; wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves and unto all the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church which He has purchased with His own blood."

And with a few more such words, reminding them of his own faithfulness, and commending them to God, he closed his sermon and then they all kneeled down on the beach and Paul led them in prayer, and they all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all, for the words which he spake,—that they should see his face no more. They then accompanied him unto the ship and he departed.

Did a more pathetic or picturesque scene ever take place between pastor and people?

Why did they love him so?

Because he had been faithful to them; because he had declared unto them the whole counsel of God; because he had not kept back anything; because he did this at the cost of tears, trials, persecutions, and self support by the labor of his own hands, lest any man should accuse him of being mercenary.

Surely a man who will be true to God, true to his duty and true to his people at such a tremendous cost, deserves to be loved.

If Paul had declared only a part of the counsel of God to them, and had kept back other parts, because those parts were not popular or were unpleasant, then he would have been an unfaithful servant to God, who delivered only a part of his Master's message to His people; and he would have been an unfaithful pastor who kept back a part of the counsel of God from His people, simply because it was unpleasant or unpopular.

The oath of every witness in any court is that he will, by the help of God, tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

A man may tell the truth and yet be an untruthful witness because he does not tell the whole truth.

A half truth is a whole falsehood. I have no right as an honest man, to say

nothing of being a minister of the gospel, to preach some things I find in God's word, because they are pleasant, and because they please the people and are to my personal interest, and to keep back some other things which God's word teaches just as plainly, because they are unpleasant, unpopular, and do not suit my ideas, and would not add to my popularity as a preacher.

If God's word does not fit my ideas, then my ideas are wrong and they must be brought to fit God's word; because God's word can never be changed to fit my ideas.

If God's word does not fit my creed, then my creed is wrong, and it must be changed and made to fit God's word, for God's word can never be changed to fit any man's creed.

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," saith Paul to Timothy. 2nd Timothy 3:16.

And yet, there are people who will say, "Preach the gospel, and let other things alone."

In the first place, people who talk that way do not know what the gospel is. The gospel means "good news," "glad tidings," "word of God." Hence the gospel means "God's word" or "good news from God," and the whole Bible is the word of God. Hence every thing in the Bible is the gospel. There is as much gospel in the Old Testament as there is in the New. And the man who preaches the whole gospel preaches everything he finds in the word of God from "In the beginning God—" Gen. 1:1, to "The grace of our Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen." Rev. 22:21. Or in other words, from the first word in Genesis to the last in Revelation.

Yet, there are people who will say, "Preach the gospel but keep back part of it. Declare the counsel of God but do not declare all of the counsel of God."

"This is a rebellious people," says Isaiah, "which say to the seers, 'see not' and to the prophets, 'prophecy not unto us right things. Speak unto us smooth things. Prophecy deceits.'" Isaiah 39:9-10.

As a rule, people do not want to be told what God's word says. His word is often harsh and rough, and the people want to hear pleasant and smooth things.

But men do not always want what they most need.

"I want a cooling salve for this rising," says the patient to the Dr. "That is not what you need," answers the Dr. "You may want a salve, but you need the lance; and the lance, the very thing you do not want is the only thing that will do you any good."

"I want a little soothing syrup and morphine," says the patient.

"It is not soothing syrup and morphine that you need," replies the Dr. "You need a dose of calomel and a bottle of bitters. You would like to have your sensibilities deadened by morphine but that can never effect a cure."

"I want this crushed limb bound up," says the patient.

"Nay, says the Dr," it must come off. To grant your wish and bind up the crushed limb, would mean your death; for blood poison would soon spread over the whole system."

"I want the preacher to preach me a smooth comforting sermon," says the sinner and the worldly-minded church member.

"Nay, nay, a sermon on the wrath of God, and the vengeance of God, is what you need, and will do you far more good, than a sugar coated sermon on the love and mercy of God."

The man or woman who says with a sanctimonious air, to the preacher, "Preach the gospel and let every thing else alone," would tell his doctor to throw away all of his bitter medicines and sharp knives, and use bread pills, stump water and salves, only.

The man who says the preacher ought to preach some things in the Bible and keep back some others, is either consciously or unconsciously mutilating God's word. He is saying that parts of God's word are not given by inspiration; and that those are not profitable; either for doctrine; reproof; correction or instruction in righteousness. Hence the preachers ought not to preach those parts.

Now, if there is one word in the Bible that is not the word of God; if there is one verse in the Bible that is not Gospel; and was not given by inspiration and is not profitable, in the christian life, then that word, verse, chapter or book is Apocryphal, or is a forgery, and has no place or business in the inspired volume of God's word, and I am heartily in favor of cutting out every such word, verse, chapter and book, from the Bible.

And yet, the very people who thus stigmatize parts of God's word by saying that the preachers ought not to preach those parts, would be the very first people to raise a howl and a war-whoop against the man who would advocate the striking out of the very words, verses, chapters and books in the Bible, which they themselves declare ought not to be preached.

And if they ought not to be preached, then they ought not to be read, and if they ought not to be either preached or read, they ought not to be in the Bible.

"O consistency! thou art a jewel." The man who dares to declare the whole counsel of God; who is so bold as

to proclaim the whole gospel, will cause a stirring among the sinners and the slumbers saints as well; and he will bring upon himself the epithets of those who do not want to be disturbed in their sleep of death.

The most unpopular preacher who ever lived was Jesus Christ, and His bitterest enemies were among those who professed great zeal for God and truth, such men as the pharisees, sadducees, scribes and doctors of the Mosaic law, or D. D's, as we call them in our days.

Why was Jesus so unpopular as a preacher?

Simply because He dared to break away from the traditions of the elders; the views of the great religious leaders as we would call them today. He dared to launch out and speak as one who had authority, and not as the scribes and pharisees, whose only method of teaching was by quoting what Rabbi "So-and-So" said.

Just as many preachers in our day and time, who have no mind or opinion of their own, preach what some other preacher, or doctor of divinity says and thinks, and not what God's word teaches them by their own hard honest study of it.

Christ's teaching was directly in opposition to the generally accepted views in His day and time.

Because He did not believe just what the other rabbis believed and taught, He was declared to be "Beelzebub" or "the devil."

"Why hear ye Him, He is mad (crazy) and hath a devil or is devil-possessed?"

That is what the people said about Jesus Christ because He dared to express views different from what the people had always been taught, and different from what the big preachers in that day and time preached; and different from what the greatest and only church in that day and time believed.

And because He persisted in preaching the truth in opposition to what the preachers and people about Him believed, He was arrested, scourged, spat upon, mocked, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, and a spear driven through His heart.

That was the price Christ paid for daring to preach the truth, which the biggest preachers and the only church of His day and time did not believe, nor endorse.

But Judaism and the traditions of the elders died when Jesus died, and the Pharisees and scribes lost their influence forevermore.

Paul paid a like price for the same offense. Because he preached that Christ was the true Messiah, and that He did rise from the dead, he was called a heretic.

The Jews at Thessaionica who "believed not," moved with envy, (what an awful motive power,) took unto themselves certain lewd fellows of the baser sort and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and not finding Paul there, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, "These that have turned the world upside-down have come hither also."

If Jesus and Paul had preached just what all the other religious teachers and preachers in their day and time were preaching, and just what all the people had always been taught and believed, they would never have turned the world upside-down. But they did not preach just what the other rabbis preached, nor did any of the other apostles. Every one of them, we are told, save John, was murdered because they dared to preach things which the people did not believe nor want to believe.

When the castles of error are being bombarded, those who dwell in them will rally to their defence, like ants around a mole hole.

"Truth is bitter," says an African proverb, and it is as bitter to some Americans as it is to the Africans.

"Declare unto us, the whole counsel of God. Give us the truth and the whole truth; whether it be what we have always heard and believed or not." This is the cry of every honest heart. And like the Boreans, such people will go home from every preaching service and instead of ridiculing and vilifying the preacher and putting their opinions over against what he has said, they will search the Scriptures diligently to see if what he said is true.

Many people expect the preacher to be infallible and think themselves a little more so, for they must pass upon the infallibility of the infallible preacher.

God's word has but little weight with such people. They neither read it nor will they believe it, when it is declared unto them from the pulpit.

There are plenty of people who would rather go through life believing a falsehood than to surrender some long cherished idea.

On the other hand, there are some men and men of brains and culture who love truth for truth's sake, and in the light of the present day scholarship they know that some of the old interpretations of Scripture are false. Not the Scriptures false, but what the people say about them is false, and they demand that the preachers shall tell the people the truth.

But there are others who cannot bear the idea of a change in what they have always believed, and are ready to brand every new interpretation of

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Scripture as "unsound doctrine," and every new revision of the Scriptures, as a "dangerous Bible."

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But he did not know that the authorized, or King James version of the Scriptures, was not made until 1611, and Paul had been dead over fifteen hundred years, but, "where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise."

Some men who think themselves wiser than their fellows, are unwilling to have their old views disturbed and behind this class stands in solid phalanx the unthinking orthodox, whose position may be expressed in the well known saying, "I believe in it because it is impossible."

Such is the faith of the man who believes that a mortal sinner can live forever.

With such a mass of people unwilling to be moved, what can the preachers do?

If the ministers do not proclaim the whole counsel of God, the people, in the great majority of instance, are to be blamed for it.

From ancient days even until now, the people want their own thoughts told out to them, and through fear of offending the people, the twentieth century preacher is muzzled, or as a stern old prophet puts it, "They are dumb dogs that cannot bark."

Why? Because they are afraid of giving offense.

If the people object to having their old ideas disturbed, they will object still more to pointed preaching on questions of virtue, truth, morality, honesty and sobriety.

The minister says, "If I denounce such and such things I shall offend some man or woman." But whether it hurts or not, the truth must be proclaimed, if men and women are ever to be saved from the error of their ways."

Hence, terrible is the responsibility of the minister of the gospel.

God forgive me, if I have spoken smooth things to you and prophesied deceit.

God forgive me if I have declared a part of His truth to you and have kept back another part.

I see the faults and vices of men and women. Must I let them go on to the judgement without giving them warning? If so, God will require their blood at my hands.

And so, I may not, I dare not, I will not speak smooth things and withhold the harsh things. I will not prophesy deceits. I will not withhold any part of God's message to his people, nor to the ungodly, whether it be pleasant or unpleasant; popular or unpopular; whether it be in accord with what the people think or not.

"To the law and to the testimony"

"What saith the Scriptures?"

That should be the end of controversy with every lover of truth.

"Wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."

Books Received.

Heaven and Hell. By Alonzo Lobb. Love, Th. G. "The Bible and Reason versus Ignorance and Error," is the author's subtitle.

Mr. Love is pastor of the Baptist Church at Hendersonville, N. C., and his degree is from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this little book he takes the position against Eternal Punishment. His position is that the unsaved are punished; but not punished with a view to making them any better. They are finally—at the General Judgment—destroyed utterly. In his view Hades is the intermediate state between the grave and Judgement. This is the place in which the wicked are to suffer for their sins.

The author denies emphatically the immortality of the wicked. Immortality, says he, depends upon faith in Jesus. "There is not one single reference, nor one clear intimation, in the Bible that the soul of any man or woman in its natural, or fallen state, is immortal."

The following paragraphs express the author's conclusion: "We search the Scriptures in vain to find one single verse

that teaches the doctrine of the everlasting unending conscious suffering of the ungodly, in a literal lake of fire and brimstone, or in any or other conscious condition, and if the Bible does not teach any such doctrine then why will men and women who profess to love truth, hold to it? Yet there are those who will throw up their hands in holy (?) horror, at the thought of surrendering the long cherished idea of the unending, conscious agony of the ungodly in a seething, surging lake of fire and brimstone, which can never be quenched."

"This dogma has furnished the pulpit thunder for many a preacher, and he would feel that he was ruined for all the time, if he had to give it up. If you take away the doctrine of the everlasting conscious suffering of the ungodly in a lake of fire and brimstone which can never be quenched, what will we have to scare sinners with and force them to accept?"

Mr Love is one of the first Baptist preachers in the South to take this position. He has evidently not taken it inconsiderately, as treatise abounds with the very quotations from the Scriptures usually cited to prove the doctrine of eternal punishment. So far as we can see he has quoted any article of Scripture bearing on the subject. Of course his interpretations of these texts are subject to criticism and denial. The object of this notice, however, is to justly state Mr. Love's views. The price of his little book is 25 cents.—Biblical Recorder.

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