

Doug Stringer: The Pulpit Is Responsible

It seems more and more that we are living in a land of paradoxes. While we are all the beneficiaries of sacrifices made for the foundations laid by which we enjoy the liberties and freedoms in our nation, many would disregard the very roots of those foundations.

We are witnessing the human inclination to casually disregard what previous generations have held to be of fundamental importance. Interestingly, there are those who love to tell the church of its social obligation while also telling the church to keep silent regarding public issues.

On the one hand, many want the benefits of what the institutional church can offer when it suits them while also undermining the very heart that motivates and empowers the church from its effectiveness. Oftentimes the issues that the critics tell the church to stay away from lead to the very problems they expect the church to fix.

There are those who are adamant that preachers should only preach the gospel, yet when their preaching causes them to be uncomfortable or meddles in their personal preferences, they become angry and some even become hostile. Even well-intentioned Christians fall for this.

Yet just a glance at history proves the importance of the message of justice through the pulpit. What is the gospel (Good News) to the one enslaved? What is Good News to the one bound by addictions? What is the message of Good News to those who have lost their vision of hope? What is the message of Good News when the social mores of the day are contradictory to the characteristics of the integrity, honesty and justice of God?

In his article "The Gift of Prophetic Insight," the late A.W. Tozer said:

"What God says to the church at any given time period depends altogether upon her moral and spiritual condition, and upon the spiritual need of the hour. Religious leaders who continue to mechanically expound the Scriptures without regard to the current religious situation are no better than the scribes and lawyers of Jesus' day who faithfully parroted the Law without the remotest notion of what was going on around them spiritually. ... The prophets never made that mistake nor wasted their efforts in that manner. They invariably spoke to the condition of the people of their times."

From preachers to politicians, from pulpits to political offices (and all of us in between), we need a revival of character, honesty and integrity. I love this quote from attorney-turned-transforming-revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875):

"The church must take right ground in regard to politics. Do not suppose, now, that I am going to preach a political sermon, or that I wish to have you join and get up a Christian party in politics. No, I do not believe in that. But, the time has come that Christians must vote for honest men, and take consistent ground in politics, or the Lord will curse them. They must be honest men themselves, and instead of voting for a man because he belongs to their party ... they must find out whether he is honest and upright, and fit to be trusted. ... Such is the spread of intelligence and the facility of communication in our country; that every man can know for whom he casts his vote. And if he will give his vote only for honest men, the country will be obliged to have upright rulers. All parties will be compelled to put up honest men as candidates. Christians have been exceedingly guilty in this matter. But, the time has come when they must act differently, or God will curse the nation, and withdraw His Spirit."

Interestingly, Finney wrote this more than 140 years ago; yet how prophetic it is for the time in which we live. If Scripture is true and if what is manifested in the natural realm is any reflection of a spiritual context, then the following words about the pulpit's responsibility would be quite fitting today.

The Pulpit Is Responsible

"Brethren, our preaching will bear its legitimate fruits. If immorality prevails in the land, the fault is ours in a great degree. If there is a decay of conscience, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the public press lacks moral discrimination, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the church is degenerate and worldly, the pulpit is responsible for it. If the world loses its interest in religion, the pulpit is responsible for it. If Satan rules in our halls of legislation, the pulpit is responsible for it. If our politics become so corrupt that the very foundations of our government are ready to fall away, the pulpit is responsible for it. Let us not ignore this fact, my dear brethren; but let us lay it to heart, and be thoroughly awake to our responsibility in respect to the morals of this nation." —Charles G. Finney, Dec. 4, 1873

And what about the many who loved the truth more than their own lives so that we could have the freedoms and opportunity we have today? I'm glad that many, including Martin Luther King, Jr., did not settle into complacency but realized their godly and moral obligation to raise a banner of honesty and truth.

Rowland Hill (1744-1833), a popular English preacher, said, "I don't like those mighty fine preachers who round off their sentences so beautifully that they are sure to roll off the sinner's conscience." We definitely need voices of conviction and character today.

We all love to quote 2 Chronicles 7:14 when we want personal and corporate breakthroughs, yet oftentimes we merely pray with our shallow platitudes or religious incantations. We forget that institutional religion without authentic relationship becomes nothing more than sets of rules to be broken or amended.

God's response to those who take the posture to humble themselves, pray, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways is to hear, forgive and heal! Rather than turn our backs on God, let us hear His voice of reason to turn around and see Him face to face.

We need a renewed hunger for God's will in our lives. The need for courageous and persevering leadership is needed more today than ever before.

We live in a world of global challenges and seeming uncertainties. The faith of many has been shaken, causing disillusionments, disappointments and discouragements. Their vision of hope and faith is blurred so they are distracted from God's intended destination (destiny) for their lives. We need voices of truth with a timely and critical message that reminds us of the proper foundations and order of faith, as well as equips us to fight the good fight of faith. We have plenty of preachers and politicians who are oratorically gifted, yet many lack the character and substance to go with it.

We are not in need of more opinions and ideas by theorists, but rather those who will lead us in the paths of truth and great expectations that only comes from a hope beyond ourselves. We need a divine revelation and intervention. We need the manifold wisdom and practical wisdom of God for the challenging times in which we live. Fame may come in a moment, but greatness comes with longevity.

May we humble ourselves, pray (prayerlessness in private is

powerlessness in public), and seek God's face and divine intervention. May we turn around!

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