

# Preaching False and True

by A.W. Pink

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*A.W. Pink's sermon addresses the critical balance between legality and licentiousness in preaching the true Gospel of Christ.*

**Scripture:** Acts 20:24, Romans 1:16, 2 Corinthians 3:9

**Topics:** "Balance in Preaching", "Righteousness and Grace"

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## Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the critical balance between legality and licentiousness in preaching, asserting that true evangelical preaching must uphold both the righteousness and grace of God. He warns against the dangers of legalistic preaching that distorts the Gospel by promoting self-righteousness, as well as licentious preaching that undermines the seriousness of sin and repentance. Pink stresses that a faithful minister must clearly communicate the necessity of Christ's atonement while also calling for a life of holiness and obedience. He highlights the importance of being taught by the Holy Spirit to effectively convey these truths, ensuring that the message remains true to Scripture. Ultimately, Pink calls for a return to authentic preaching that honors both God's justice and mercy.

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## Transcript

### Licentious Preaching

The twofoldness of Divine Truth is broadly illustrated by the dividing of God's Word into its two Testaments, wherein, characteristically speaking, we have set forth the Divine Law and the Divine Gospel, and where distinctively (though not exclusively) God is revealed respectively as "Light" and "Love." The same twofoldness of Truth appears in each of those grand objects and subjects; though this is far from being as clearly apprehended as it should be. The Law which God gave unto Israel was a dual one, consisting of the Moral and the Ceremonial: the Moral Law specially exemplifying God's righteousness and the Ceremonial His grace--the merciful provision which He made and which was available for those who came under the condition of the former. In like manner, the Gospel contains a dual manifestation of the Divine character and perfections: while it is "the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) proclaiming the free favor of God to the undeserving, it is also denominated "the ministration of righteousness" (II Cor. 3:9) and "the Word of righteousness" (Heb. 5:13). Paul declared "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.. .for therein is the righteousness of God revealed"(Rom.1:16,17).

In view of this twofoldness of Truth and the opposition of the carnal mind thereto, it should no more surprise us that such diverse elements as legality and lawlessness are found in the same persons than we

should be to read that Pilate and Herod who "were at enmity between themselves," on the day of our Saviour's mock trial before them "were made friends together" (Luke 23:12), and that they made common cause in opposing and condemning Him. Legality is the perverting of God's Law. Lawlessness or licentiousness is the corrupting of the Gospel: or if we speak of these evils as they apply to the distinctive features of each, legality is the wresting of the righteous element in both the Law and the Gospel, while licentiousness is the abuse of the grace element in them. For while it be true that grace is the outstanding and predominant characteristic of the Gospel, yet it must ever be insisted upon that it is not a grace which is exercised at the expense of righteousness, rather does it reign "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21).

Now since it be true that the roots of both legality and licentiousness are found in every man by nature, it behooves the servant of God to be on his most prayerful and careful guard against giving place to either of these evils, for in proportion as he does so the Truth is falsified and the souls of his hearers are poisoned. If he be guilty of preaching in a legalistic way, the person and work of Christ is dishonored and the spirit of self-righteousness is fed to those who sit under him. Unless he makes it crystal clear that none but Christ can avail the sinner and that there is in Him a sufficiency to meet his every need, unless he expresses himself beyond a peradventure of being misunderstood that the merits of Christ's righteousness and blood are the sole means for delivering a believing sinner from the curse of the broken law and his alone title to everlasting bliss, he has failed at the most vital point of his mission and duty. The trumpet he is called upon to blow must give forth no uncertain sound at this point: nothing but faith in the finished work of Christ, and nothing added thereto, can supply the sinner with a standing-ground before the thrice holy God.

On the other hand, it is equally important and essential that the minister steer clear of the opposite extreme. If he be guilty of preaching in a licentious way then the person and work of Christ is equally dishonored and the spirit of religious bolshevism is fostered in his hearers. Unless he makes it as plain as an object bathed in the light of the noonday sun that God hates sin, all sin, and will not compromise with or condone it in any one; unless he declares and insists that Christ came to save His people from their sins--from the love of them, from the dominion of them--he has failed at the most essential part of his task. The great work of the pulpit is to press the authoritative claims of the Creator and Judge of all the earth, to show how sort we have come of meeting God's just requirements, to announce His imperative demand of repentance--the sinner must throw down the weapons of his rebellion and forsake his evil way before he can trust in Christ to the saving of his soul: that Christ is to be received as King to rule over him as well as Priest to atone for him, to surrender to Him as his rightful Lord ere he can embrace him as his gracious Saviour.

Such a task as we have briefly outlined above is no easy one, and only those who are called and qualified by God are fitted to discharge it. To preserve the balance of Truth so that the requirements of righteousness and the riches of grace are equally poised: to avoid Arminianism on the one side and Antinomianism on the other is an undertaking far beyond the capacity of any "novice" (1 Tim. 3:6). It requires a "workman" and not a lazy man, a student and not a sloven, one who studies to "show himself approved unto God" (2 Tim. 2:15) and not one who seeks the applause and the shekels of men. Nor can any human education or self-development of the intellectual faculty impart this capacity. No indeed: only in the school of Christ can this accomplishment be acquired; only as the Holy Spirit is his Teacher can any man be furnished unto such an undertaking. The preacher must first be taught himself, taught experimentally and effectually, taught in his soul to love what God loves and hate what God hates, and then be given wisdom from above to express the same according to the Scriptural pattern before he is

ready to show unto others the way of life.

It is because so many untaught men, unregenerate men, now occupy the pulpits that "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6) is being so widely and generally disseminated. Multitudes who have neither "tasted that the Lord is gracious" nor have "the fear of the Lord" in them have, from various motives and considerations, invaded the sacred calling of the ministry, and out of the abundance of their corrupt hearts they speak. Being blind themselves, they lead the blind into the ditch. Having no love for the Shepherd they have none for the sheep, being but "hirelings." They are themselves "of the world" and therefore "the world heareth them" (1 John 4:5), for they preach that which is acceptable unto fallen human nature, and as like attracts like, they gather around themselves a company of admirers who flatter and support them. They will bring in just enough of God's Truth to deceive the unwary and give the appearance of orthodoxy to their message, but not sufficient of the Truth, especially the searching portions thereof, to render their hearers uncomfortable by destroying their false peace. They will name Christ but not preach Him, mention the Gospel but not expound it.

Some of these men will preach legality under the pretense of furthering morality and honoring the Divine Law. They will preach up good works, but lay no foundation on which they may be built. They confound justification and sanctification, making personal holiness to be the ground of the sinner's acceptance before God. They sow their vineyards with "divers seed" (Deut. 22:9) so that Law and Gospel, Divine grace and creature performances are so mingled together that their distinctive characters are obliterated. Others preach Licentiousness under the guise of magnifying the grace of God. They omit the Divine call to repentance, say nothing about the necessity of forsaking our sins if we are to obtain mercy (Prov. 28:13), lay no stress upon regeneration as a being made "a new creature In Christ" (2 Cor. 5:17), but declare that the sinner has simply to accept Christ as his personal Saviour--though his heart be still unhumbled, without contrition and thoroughly in love with the world--and eternal life is now his. The result of this preaching is well calculated to bolster up the deluded, for instead of insisting that saving faith is evidenced by its spiritual fruits, instead of teaching that the Christian life is a warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil and that none but the overcomer will reach Heaven, they are assured--no matter how carnal their walk--that "once saved, always saved," and thus they are soothed in their sins and comforted with a false peace unto they awake in Hell. Shun all such preaching, my reader, as you would a deadly plague. "Cease, my son, to hearken the instruction that causeth thee to err from the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19:27).

### Evangelical Preaching

Evangelical preaching is that preaching which accords with the spirit and substance of the Gospel of with neither legality nor licentiousness: which gives full place to both the grace of God and the righteousness of God. It maintains the claims of Divine holiness, yet without bringing the soul into bondage. It proclaims a free salvation without making light of sin. It presents a Saviour who is suited to and sufficient for the very chief of sinners, yet affirms that only those who have been brought to loathe themselves and are sick of sin will welcome such a holy Physician. It announces the glorious liberty into which the sons of God have been brought and urges them to stand fast in the same, yet it also points out that such liberty is the very reverse of being a license granted us to indulge the lusts of the flesh without fear of consequences. While denying that good works enter at all into the ground of our acceptance with God, care is taken to show that a faith which does not produce good works is worthless and saves no one.

Our lot is cast in a day of such spiritual darkness, ignorance, and corrupting of the Truth that there is as much need for pointing out what true evangelical preaching consists of, as there is for showing what is not either legal or licentious preaching. Where real evangelism is to be found (and few are the places where it now exists) so great is the confusion in many minds that there are not a few who will charge that preacher with either legality or licentiousness. Both are items of opprobrium, the former especially being one which Satan is very fond of using or discrediting the servants of God, and once the rumor gains currency that such and such a preacher is "Legalistic" many people will shun his ministrations. Those who insist that the Moral Law is the believer's Rule of conduct and who press the perceptive parts of Scripture are often dubbed "Legalists" and charged with bringing God's people into bondage, but such an accusation is both baseless and slanderous, and must not be heeded by lovers of the Truth.

Our object before us in writing on our present subject is that the few servants of God now remaining may be freed from the unjust aspersions which religious libertines are so fond of heaping upon them, and that those Christians who read this chapter may be more on their guard against giving ear to false accusations. Those who declare that sanctification or practical holiness is an essential part of salvation, who insist upon a godly walk as the necessary evidence of a credible profession, and who faithfully warn the Lord's people that looseness of conduct and lack of strictness in their deportment will certainly sever communion with their Beloved, will be most unfairly charged with "legality." Those who lay much emphasis upon the vital importance of maintaining a conscience void of offense toward God and men, who insist upon the needs-be of the Christian's daily confessing every known sin before his Father, and of making full restitution unto every fellow-creature he has wronged in any way, will be unjustly charged with bringing the saints into bondage.

Not only should the reader be much on his guard against forming or entertaining any unwarrantable criticisms of a true servant of God, but he needs to be watchful lest he gives ear unto any of Satan's lies against himself. So difficult is it to keep the scales equally poised, so easily do we fail to heed both sides of the Truth, that we are ever prone to lose the balance. Yet, knowing our danger here, yea even when preserved therefrom, the great Enemy of our souls will seek to persuade us we are guilty of erring. When such a scripture as "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22) is before us and we perceive that a moral fitness is required in order to obtain an audience with the Majesty on high, the Devil will be ready to tell us that we are denying the sufficiency of Christ's blood to give us access--confounding out legal title to do so with our experimental meanness. When we give heed to such a word as "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18) the Devil will come as an angel of light bidding us beware of entertaining the thought that God's answering of our prayers is dependent upon something good in ourselves.

Now evangelical preaching is designed to equip the Lord's people so that they can repel such assaults of the Enemy and preserve them from the two extremes to which they are prone. Evangelical preaching will expound the Everlasting Covenant which God has made with His people in Christ and show that the whole of their corruption becomes their greatest burden and grief. At regeneration God puts His laws into their hearts and writes them in their minds (Heb. 10:16) and so places His holy fear within them that they shall never fully or finally depart from Him (Jer. 32:40). After their regeneration the Spirit renews them day by day (2 Cor. 4:16), causing them to walk in the paths of righteousness and recovering them when they stray therefrom.

Evangelical preaching places the crown of honor where it rightfully belongs: not upon the creature, but upon the head of the Lord Jesus. It makes nothing of man and everything of Christ. It ever reminds the believer that it is a sovereign God who makes him to differ from the reprobate and that he has nothing good whatever in himself save what has been communicated to him by the blessed Spirit (1 Cor. 4:7). It teaches him that "all his springs" are in the Lord (Ps. 87:7), that he must draw upon and draw from Him all that he needs, receiving out of His exhaustless "fullness, grace for grace" (John 1:16). It teaches him that Christ is his "life" (Col. 3:4), that he has no life apart from Christ, so that he must daily live in Christ, live on Christ, live unto Christ. Said the apostle, "Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20); and again, "for me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21); and yet again, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (4:13).

At the same time evangelical preaching is careful to insist upon human responsibility and to call for the full discharge of Christian duty. It presents to view the exalted and changeless standard at which we must ever aim: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). It warns us against making any excuse for failure to attain unto that standard, bidding us judge ourselves unsparingly for all failure, and to renew our efforts in pressing forward to the same. It tells us we have no strength of our own but must seek it from above, yet points out that the way to obtain more is to use what we already have (Luke 8:18). It calls the believer to a life of unreserved obedience to his Lord, but insists that the motive for the same must be love and gratitude for all He suffered on his account. It faithfully declares that backsliding will bring severe chastisement upon the Christian (Ps. 89:30-32), and that if he would have the rod removed he must forsake that which occasioned it.

Evangelical preaching avoids the snare of legality by bringing in Christ as the believer's Object: the One to whom he owes everything, the One to whom he must apply for the supply of every need, the One whom he is to glorify by a walk which is pleasing in His sight. Evangelical preaching lays the axe at the roots of self-righteousness by constantly reminding the believer of his continual indebtedness to Divine grace, that nothing he can do is to be least degree meritorious, and that should he fully perform his duty he is still "an unprofitable servant." On the other hand, evangelical preaching avoids the snare of licentiousness by steadily holding up the Divine standard of "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation" or "behavior" (1 Pet. 1:15), but constantly pressing both the exhortations and warnings of Scripture, and by reminding its hearers "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Well may every true servant of God exclaim "Who is sufficient for these things!" (2 Cor. 2:16); and well it is when he can--humbly, dependently, but truthfully--add, "our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 3:5).

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