

Minister in a Decaying Society

by W.W. Adams

W.W. Adams challenges the church to restore one another with gentleness, address accusations biblically, and overcome historical weaknesses through knowledge and fellowship.

Duration: 18:38

Scripture: 1 Timothy 5:19

Topics: "Society"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker expresses frustration with the focus on social implications of the gospel rather than biblical teachings. He emphasizes that every phase of life, including manhood, is covered in the Bible and urges the Christian Life Commission to prioritize biblical teachings over social issues. The speaker also highlights the importance of practicing Christian ethics within the church rather than trying to change the behavior of non-believers. He then discusses the historical weaknesses of the Baptist denomination, including divisions over trivial matters, and calls for self-reflection and learning from past mistakes.

Transcript

In Galatians 6.1, if a man be overtaken in any trespass, that will include doctrinal trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself, lest you also be tempted. Anybody overtaken in any trespass, you who are straight are to restore. Now, the word restore is used of doctors who are called to help a sick person or an injured person get back to health.

Every one of us is under those instructions. If anybody goes astray in anything, every one of us is to be for that person what a doctor or a surgeon is. And I don't believe you would call a doctor if he had a reputation of staying away from the sick person and criticizing him from his back, or if he comes to him, kick and slash around, rather than be gentle and help him get well.

I also found 1 Timothy 5, 19 to 21. And this one passage, if practiced, would close up 99% of all the scandal sheets that have published criticizing fellow Christians. Against an elder, do not receive an accusation unless you have two or three witnesses.

I charge you in the sight of God in Christ Jesus and the angels, observe these things without prejudice. Do nothing by partiality. You don't even listen to an accusation.

And the elder, any leader, any leader is an elder. But elsewhere, even all the believers are to be treated the same way. You can never even listen to an accusation made against anybody until you have two or three witnesses that it's so.

And then you are to go to the one who is supposed to be an elder and treat him like a Christian rather than the way we do it. This brings us to the heart of the experience that I want to tell you. I witnessed the final stages in the exposure of the basic weakness of Northern Baptists.

In reading Baptist history, I saw how our earlier zeal and thrill, undergirded by our freedom, thrust us forward and bore rich fruit for some generations. But long before there was liberalism, we Baptists were creating for ourselves an image that should have warned us to look again. We made it clear that we could fight for love and use freedom and then abuse it so as to discredit it and ourselves.

Long before liberalism arose, we were being laughed at, I got all this in history, for wrangling and dividing over such issues as the location of the church or the choir in the church, whether to have an organ or a piano or separate rooms for Sunday school classes, a small individual glass for communion rather than the big glass for everybody, and shall we have a pastor who is educated and should he be paid a salary, a church baptistry rather than a running stream, and over such questions as card playing, dances, and the like. Long before there was liberalism, the human race was laughing at people who would do things like that. There was also enslavement to tradition, evidence of personal ambitions and self-seeking, a growing body of completely inactive members, and a deadening amount of worldliness among inactive and even many active members.

I uncovered things, I uncovered embarrassing amounts of this sort of material in the history of Baptism. These things cover up primary matters and discredit believers and their principles. Northern Baptists did that.

They ignored, abused, and contradicted their principles and themselves. Into that situation modernism did come, and Northern Baptists treated them exactly as their history would suggest. There were able and dedicated leaders who sought to resolve their problem in harmony with the Bible's requirements, but these were smothered by a vast multitude of people professing to be loyal to Christ and Scripture.

But in spirit and method, they ignored and violated more Scripture and did more damage many times than the liberals themselves. They never investigated accusations to see if they were true, never dealt personally with the accused, but headlined whatever they could hear in sermons, over the radio and in print. They would twist printed material to say what it did not say, using it often to get a name and a position for themselves and to discredit somebody they did not like.

They would criticize and condemn modernists who were always somewhere else, in other words, behind their backs. Instead of preaching the gospel and feeding the sheep, they would brand as modernists anybody they didn't like. Not one in a thousand ever dealt personally with the accused, sitting down together as Christians, each seeking to learn as well as to correct as the Bible requires.

Of course, heretics did not practice the Scripture, that's why they were heretics. But it sure does hurt when those who profess loyalty to Christ and Scripture deny both, in spirit and in what they do, how those people could hate. Did you ever see parents in dealing with a naughty child act uglier than the child? Dr. Elmore, Dr. Stilwell and I, all of Eastern, attended a fundamentalist fellowship meeting in a Philadelphia Baptist church.

We thought we belonged there, we certainly didn't belong with the liberals. At the end of the day, we found that we had all privately promised God never again. Hate and bitter criticism of absent leaders, personal bragging, were poison to us.

No wonder J.C. Massey, many of you knew him, Earl Pierce and scores of others, all powerful fundamental leaders, left the fundamentalists, as they put it, to save their own souls. J.C. Massey told a faculty at Eastern that very statement, I left them because I had to save my own soul. Heresy in spirit and deed, there is heresy in spirit and deed just as well as in creed.

I preached a dedicatory sermon in a three million dollar new Baptist church, and there has never been one iota of liberalism in that church. There are now four splits from that church. There are now five churches in the place of the one.

In my eight years in Kansas City, I spoke at least 200 times all over the Midwest. It would be announced that I was from the Baptist seminary. I had scores upon scores of men to come to me and say, I used to be a Baptist, when I quizzed them.

Well, the Baptists kept hussing and wrangling until we joined the Methodists or somebody else. There was scarcely a church in the Northern Convention that had not split from one to several times. From one-fourth to one-third of all their churches were founded by the losing side of a church split, not one in ten being over modernism.

Twenty years ago, Northern Baptists split, and so we had a conservative Northern Baptist Convention. Now they have split wide open and we have two conservative conventions. Why this tragedy? For decades, Northern Baptists, long before there was any liberalism, baptized thousands of converts and turned them loose.

About one-half enrolled in Sunday school, about half of them attended Sunday school, and about two percent of those said that the Bible taught us to learn it. Out of such ignorance, how on earth could there be clear understanding of the gospel, the church, church membership in Christian duty? How could there be cohesion and cooperation? Of course, whirliness and confusion came into pulpits and pews. They could not and did not settle problems, including liberalism, biblically, because they didn't know the Bible.

And they depredated themselves and their principles. To become Christian brings us into fellowship, divine and human. It is interrelationship of persons.

It is sharing life. It is intercommunication. It calls for intelligent, cooperative action.

Northern Baptists choked the channels of intercommunication and smothered life. They choked the only way you can live and work together, and that's for everybody to use his freedom under the Spirit's direction, everybody thinking and making himself heard, and everybody else helping everybody to keep that freedom and to use it, and not to frighten him to the point where he's afraid to speak, lest his head would be cut off. This was the weakness, not liberalism.

Modernism revealed the weakness rooted in biblical illiteracy. So if you forget everything, you have to remember what I'm saying. The thing that hurt Northern Baptists was not knowing their scriptures, so they did not handle any issues, including liberalism, like Christians are supposed to handle issues.

It was liberalism that revealed their basic weakness, which was simply illiteracy. Northern Baptists are now taking steps to come back. I wish I could tell you that story.

Now, what can we do? In three minutes, I'm going to name some things we could do. First, we could learn from Northern Baptists. They betrayed and contradicted every one of their basic principles until the public laughed at them.

You and I ought to start by admitting that we've done the same thing. They're not ten feet separating the position of Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists in the matter of practicing the most elementary Christianity in handling issues. We ought to start right where we are, admitting that we have somehow got off the highway.

Talk about the autonomy of the local church. Well, I guess we better see if we can start in and prove to people that we really can run our churches for Christ and not just for ourselves. In one city, in eight years, there have been 18 individual church blow-ups over the pastor, either resigning or wouldn't resign, and a losing group in many cases went off and founded a new church.

Brethren, don't ever expect to win the public to that kind of a local church. I wish you would get the printed speech, which they'll have, and notice the five names. I've given five names and addresses in there.

Northern leaders, four of them, Northern Baptist leaders. I knew what was going on, and I wrote them, and I have the letters from each one saying to me, you may say publicly and you may put in print that we, one of these is an official in Connecticut, two in Pennsylvania, one's in Chicago, Northern Baptist leaders, state secretaries and so on, and if you write to them, they will tell you that they are getting letters all the time or requests from Southern Baptist pastors asking them to help Southern Baptist pastors get passage in the Northern Baptist Convention. Now those men are telling, one of them said, Adams, you don't have any idea how much the erosion is that's going on.

Men getting out of the South to go to the North. I didn't say that's right, I'm reporting. Only I've asked lots of them why they want to go.

I stayed in the home of an insurance man who said we have 117 ex-pastors selling insurance, over half of them Southern Baptist pastors, and I got the reason. And don't you hear those reasons until you have a dose of prerogative with you. You and I had better take care of the autonomy of the local church and see that the people know how to run it for Christ and not for some cranky idea.

Then, the priesthood of all believers, a priest is supposed to mediate God to people. Well, how can three and a half million of our Southern Baptists, we can't even find where they are. What kind of priest is that? You go to college, university campuses and have a dozen men stand around you, they stood around me and point their finger and say, priesthood of all believers, a people of the book and sneer.

By their fruits, they say that's exactly what's ruining it. For they quote one man in one hour from where he was, new. Ten Baptist pastors, every one of them is Orthodox in this room, but in ten years, ten of them had left their pastures between sundown and sunup because they were caught in sex with some of the man's wife.

I have a letter from a pastor, an old pastor who says, I know 31 Baptist preachers who have left their churches either for immorality or having misappropriated funds. On and on the story goes. What can we do? Well, we might start at the beginning because we have disgraced every one of our principles.

Every pastor says the first requirement in my church is see if I can get a regenerate church membership. And I'd like to say one word to the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. I wish I could rebuke them like I want to.

For heaven's sake, stop being unbiblical and talking about the social implications of the gospel. Please be biblical. In my Bible, the God of the universe who made everything has a will for everything and has revealed it in the most of it all.

Every phase of life was covered. So in the prophet, so in Jesus, so in the epistle. Every phase of life, God would and man would, is covered.

And listen, from now on, won't you men of the Christian Life Commission quit talking about the social implications and talk about the social imperatives? That's what my Bible has. And the issue is not can we get unsaved people to practice Christian ethics. The problem is, can we get the church members to practice? And listen, my Lord came to earth in as dark a day as we are in.

He found the truth and lived it. He found love and practiced it. He even exercised hope in the midst of darkness.

I leave that with you and me. History says we will not make the change to save the day. I dare you in the name of Christ to be the first group to change it.

Let's not slide along. I could prove to you that Catholics are depending on us to keep on wrangling and dividing so they can take the field. Let's start now, and for one year, criticize not a single person behind his back.

Go to him alone or keep quiet. And if you go to one who you think is a sinner or a heretic, sit down with him, reminding them that he may teach you some things as well as you teach him some. One day in Eastern Seminary, just before my 11 o'clock class, I was in my room to prepare for my 11 o'clock class.

The door opened, didn't even knock on the door. One of my colleagues on the faculty, a great man, came storming in. Have you heard about him? He thought the president of our seminary had gone a little liberal.

Have you heard about him? Have you heard? I said, just a minute, have you said these things to him? No, I said, where's the door? He was stuck, he was stunned. I said, listen, in my Bible, the Bible demands that you say it to him first. And if you haven't said it to him, you yourself are violating Scripture, and I don't see how one crooked man can straighten out another crooked man.

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