

March, 2006

# Pause Ponder Profit

## “After That I Have Preached To Others” (1 Cor. 9:27)

by Dan Richardson

I have preached the gospel for almost 30 years. During that time I have experienced the highs and lows that go along with this work. On the one hand, I have rejoiced to tears in seeing those with whom I've studied and for whom I've prayed obey Christ. I have also seen unfaithful brethren heed warning and exhortation by “confessing their sins one to another” (James 5:16), resolving to be faithful in their service to God. On the other hand, I've witnessed to dismay the stubbornness of people to the gospel, as well as the indifference and rebellion of my own brethren who turn back to the world of sin from which they were called. In my discouragement to my seeming ineffectiveness as a preacher, I would always be revived in spirit by the realization of how important the work of gospel preaching is and my deep yearning to do this work.

**Every preacher, young and old, should remember “after that I have preached to others....”**

**I have first preached to myself.** A preacher isn't “worth his salt” if he doesn't realize his sermon should be directed to himself. The prophet Ezra, regarding his teaching ancient Israel, is described in these words: “*For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances*” (Ezra 7:10). Notice the order — he first sought to learn and practice God's law personally before he attempted to be a teacher of others. Likewise, Paul instructed Timothy, a younger preacher, to “*Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things...*” (1 Tim. 4:16).

It is the greatest hypocrisy for a preacher to enforce a standard of conduct upon others that he is not willing to apply to himself. Remember Paul's condemnation of some Jewish teachers in his day: “*...for when thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest dost practice the same things. And reckonest thou this, O man, who judgest them that practice such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgement of God?*” (Rom. 2:2-3). Later, in the same chapter, Paul asked these hypocrites, “*thou therefore that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?*” (Vs. 21). I'm persuaded this would be a good question for all preachers/teachers of the gospel to ask themselves. Paul's point in 1 Cor. 9:27 was that if preachers/teachers of others don't first consider themselves (i.e., “practice what you preach”), they can lose their own souls.

**God gives the increase, not I.** Regarding his labors in Corinth, Paul said, “*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase*” (1 Cor. 3:6). Both Paul and Apollos were active in the

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Lord's work at Corinth by preaching and teaching the gospel. The response that came, however, was not by their own power, but through God's power to save in the gospel (Rom. 1:16). A failure to remember this is one reason preachers have a problem with the sin of pride. When preachers attribute successes in their work to their own ability, knowledge, flamboyance, etc., instead of God they are, as brother Robert Turner would say, "whittling on God's end of the stick". We preachers would do ourselves, our families and our brethren a great service by guarding against pride. Sometimes when I hear others speak of a brother being a "good preacher", I wonder what they mean by that. Do we judge one so because he "preaches the word...in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2) — which scripturally defines a good preacher? Or, do we refer to his ability to spellbound his audience with his oratorical skills and entertain his audience with humorous anecdotes?

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah that His word, "will not return to Him void but it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isa. 55:10-11). Instead of despairing to the point of no productivity because no one seems to be listening, the faithful preacher goes forth proclaiming God's word, knowing that his "labors are not vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). Like Ezekiel, who God sent forth to prophesy to an "impudent and stiffhearted" people that they might know "that there hath been a prophet among them" (Ezek. 2:4-5), we today will obey our Lord's commission to take the gospel to a world lost in sin (Matt. 28:18-19; Mk. 16:15-16), with the realization that not all will obey. We must never view their successes/failures by the numbers of those who do/do not respond but by the opportunities given to us to convey truth. Let the preachers/teachers of truth rejoice in this knowledge and not be weary in well-doing (Gal. 6:9).

**I have given the best I can.** Jesus teaches, "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26, NKJV). Any and all things of this world fail in comparison to our eternal soul. In a time when so many are infatuated by the things of this world — "cares and riches and pleasures of this life" (Lk. 8:14) — we should be heartened to preach/teach the gospel. God's only power to save (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:21).

Many and various "reforms" have been attempted throughout history to change mankind for the better, and though outwardly they may have appeared successful, they were short-lived because they didn't address the one thing that needed changed — the hearts of men. A case in point would be the efforts of modern religions catering to man's appetite to be entertained by concerts, plays, "fellowship meals", sports activities in "church gymnasiums", etc. They do nothing to convict the sinner and instruct in righteousness. As one esteemed fellow-preacher once said, "When you draw people to religion with fried chicken, tea, and ice cream they will become spiritually as dead as the chicken, as weak as the tea, and as cold as the ice cream!" The gospel of Christ is directed to the inner man by pricking his heart (Acts 2:37), and bringing forth obedience from the heart (Rom. 6:17; 2 Cor. 5:17). This truly changes each individual for the better, and we who preach should rejoice and thank God for the privilege to be involved in such work.

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## “To Obey Is Better Than . . .”

by Dan Richardson

**I**n 1 Samuel 15:1-23, we find a classic example of disobedience in Saul, the king of Israel. After receiving the clear commandment from the Lord through Samuel the prophet (verses 1-3), Saul disobeyed God by bringing back Agag, king of the Amalekites, and the choice animals for sacrifice to God (verses 9, 15). Samuel told Saul, “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (verses 22).

Like Saul, we too need to learn that obeying God is the most important thing to consider in our lives. Saul was guilty of allowing other concerns to blind him to what was truly important. Consider that he had to learn obedience is better than...

**Not counting his blessings (verse 1).** All the good things in Saul’s life, including his reign as king over Israel, were blessings from God. God is the source of all that is good and perfect (James 1:17), therefore, we should live in the spirit of thankfulness (Ephesians 5:20). If Saul had lived daily, counting his blessings and praising God for all the good in his life, it is doubtful he would have been so negligent. A lack of thankfulness is always the beginning of a dark way in life (cf. Romans 1:2 Iff).

**Being indifferent to what God calls evil (verses 2-3).** God told Saul what evil the Amalekites had done to the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. This should have made a profound effect on Saul’s thinking toward this enemy. But it obviously didn’t by the fact that he did not obey God concerning them and spared king Agag. Many throughout history have been guilty of being indifferent to evil, even going to the extreme of calling evil “good” and good “evil” (Isaiah 5:20). Only God, through His

word, can define what’s good and evil, and we must view such as God does. The apostle Paul says, “...*abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good*” (Romans 12:9).

**Being fearful of man (verses 9, 24).** In the text, Saul’s problem is plainly stated: “... I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (verses 24). Rather than fearing God and obeying His voice, Saul feared the people and obeyed them! How characteristic of those with no faith and confidence in God. Warnings abound in scripture regarding this point. Of some Jewish rulers who believed in Jesus, it is said, “...*they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God*” (John 12:42-43). Paul said, “*If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ*” (Galatians 1:10). God’s ways and man’s ways are not alike (Isaiah 55:8-9).

**Believing the end justifies the means (verses 15, 21).** Saul’s philosophy appears to have been, “let us do evil that good may come” (cf. Romans 3:8). He had allowed the people to bring back chosen animals for the intended purpose of making sacrifice to God — the same God who commanded them to be slain. A valuable lesson is seen here which needs to be understood in every generation: **Service to God is vain when not offered on His terms.** For this reason, many religious efforts are futile today (Matthew 7:21-23; 15:8-9).

**Being deceived (verse 20).** It appears, in his answer to Samuel, that Saul thought he had obeyed God. If he did, he allowed himself to be deceived. Satan is called “the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). But we can prevent such deception if we trust in God. Many scriptures warn us against being deceived (cf. Galatians 6:3, 7; I Corinthians 15:33).

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**Failing to see sin as sin (verse 23).** In this verse, Samuel told Saul that his sin was as bad as if he had committed witchcraft or idolatry! The lesson here is a powerful one: sin is sin. Saul did not equate his actions as sinful, especially not as that of witchcraft or idolatry. But what makes anything sinful is the fact that it is a transgression of God’s law (1 John 3:4). Many become guilty of categorizing sin (like a “little white lie”), but truthfully, any action that is sinful places one under God’s condemnation (James 2:10).

Saul’s example of disobedience is given so we might learn from it. God’s command to him was clear and understandable. Saul’s disobedience was the result of his lack of faith, his fears and his pride. In conclusion, let it be observed that obedience to God is essential to the salvation of all (Hebrews 5:8-9). God’s wrath in the Judgment awaits those who “obey not the gospel” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

*One who turns away his ear  
from hearing the law,  
Even his prayer is an abomination.*

*Proverbs 28:9*

*He who covers his sins  
will not prosper,  
But whoever confesses and  
forsakes them will have mercy.*

*Proverbs 28:13*



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