

LESSON 222

UNCHANGING MESSAGE

Related Scripture: Romans 15:13-33

KEY VERSE: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."—James 3:1.

Lesson Scripture: II Timothy 4:1-5;
Philippians 4:5-9

Introduction:

"Social change" has become an obsession with modern religion, so that it has become fashionable to assume that the message of Christianity must be changed to suit the times. Such assumptions are a result of gross spiritual ignorance. The simple fact is that the swiftly changing conditions of our modern world, though very noticeable and impressive to the natural mind, are nevertheless superficial and incidental.

Moral principles and spiritual realities remain unchanged. In view of eternal judgment, questions of right and wrong are not determined by tradition, custom, or popular vote. And in view of the solemn facts of life and death revealed in God's word, it is of small importance how rapidly we can communicate and travel around in this world while we live; it is infinitely more important that we have satisfactory communication with our Creator and be prepared to meet Him in a better world when we die.

Other books are soon outdated, but the Bible remains meaningful and pertinent to human needs in every generation. Though it be neglected, it is yet the most needed message for our world today, as it has been in generations past and will be until Jesus comes again.

For an outline of the lesson, consider:

1. Christian Preaching, II Tim. 4:1-5
 - a. Ministry required, 1
 - b. Ministry reviewed, 2
 - c. Ministry rejected, 3, 4
 - d. Ministry reinforced, 5
2. Christian Peace, Philippians 4:5-9
 - a. Peaceful attitude, 5
 - b. Peaceful appeals, 6
 - c. Peaceful abiding, 7
 - d. Peaceful attention, 8
 - e. Peaceful action, 9

Notes on the Printed Text:

Christian Preaching, II Timothy 4:1-5.

Paul understood that God has only one message for a world of sinners: the message of His word. There may be ten thousand ways of stating ten thousand portions of divine truth, but the minister of God's word needs no other message; he needs only to be faithful in declaring the faith once delivered. (Jude 3.)

God is pleased to use "the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (I Cor. 1:21), and likewise has appointed the ministry of His word "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12.)

Ministry Required, 1.

As the official work of the ministry is a divine calling, the minister is not free to preach or not as he pleases. In due time he must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (II Cor. 5:10) to render an account to his Master. "Quick" here, as often in the KJ version, means "living."

Ministry Reviewed, 2.

Incredible as it may seem to semi-arial saboteurs, it should be possible for a minister to "preach the word" without ever referring to the latest popular novel; without ever posing as an authority in psychology, philosophy, economics, sociology, or politics; and even without entertaining the crowds with pointless jokes and deathbed stories.

Whatever the occasion, the minister is to "be instant," "stay put," or "stand by" with his message from God, whether or not it may seem seasonable to men.

Faithful preaching involves reproof, rebuke, and exhortation. These different phases of the ministry are to be carried on "in all longsuffering and doctrine." Some preachers are longsuffering enough but are weak in doctrine; others are strong enough in doctrine but are rather shortsuffering.

Ministry Rejected, 3, 4.

"The time will come," said Paul. Will any deny that it has come? People with itching ears, even professed people of God, "heap to themselves teachers" who are willing to tell them what they wish to hear rather than what they need to hear; and so the faithful preacher may find himself without a ready audience.

Ministry Reinforced, 5.

"But"—the faithful minister must be true to his calling, obedient to God, whether people can be pleased or not. He must "watch" or live soberly in all things; he must "endure afflictions" and "do the work of an evangelist." So doing, he will "make full proof" of his ministry. If he cannot be faithful to God when others turn away, he has no proper place in the ministry of the word of God.

Christian Peace, Philippians 4:5-9.

"Peace I leave with you," said Jesus to His disciples; "My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (Jn. 14:27.) And again: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33.)

Peaceful Attitude, 5.

"Moderation" here means "fairness" or "reasonableness." Some people, including too many Baptists, are unreasonable. The Philippians were admonished here to acquire a reputation for a moderate or reasonable attitude toward others. A most powerful argument for a reasonable attitude is given. "The Lord is at hand." When we realize the nearness of our Lord, we cannot dare to be harsh toward our brethren.

Peaceful Appeals, 6.

Why fret and worry over anything when we can "take it to the Lord in prayer"? He is able to give us anything He will, and is willing to give us what is good for us: what more could we want? Let us mingle thanksgiving with our appeals: He will surely give good things to them that ask Him. (Mat. 7:11.)

Peaceful Abiding, 7.

Abiding peace, the peace of God that will keep or guard hearts and minds in Christ, the peace that passes all understanding, is linked here to the practice of "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." The peace of God is with us when we trust Him to take care of us.

Peaceful Attention, 8.

Finally, what are we thinking about? Some people are continually viewing with alarm. It is easy to allow ourselves to be disturbed, or to disturb ourselves, with thoughts of real or imaginary evils. Let us rather occupy our minds with things that are "true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report." If we can find no virtue or anything to praise in men, we can still adore and praise our God.

Peaceful Action, 9.

When we think right we can do right. We have no need of new religions. The God of peace will be with us, says Paul, when we do "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me."

Key Verse:

"My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."—James 3:1.

"Masters" here means "teachers." It is amazing how many people imagine that they are qualified to teach others. There is a solemn warning here. Teaching is a serious responsibility: it is bad to be wrong ourselves, but to mislead others is worse. Teachers "shall receive the greater condemnation" because, as we read in the next verse, we all stumble in many things. But some stumble more than others, especially "in word." Too many try to teach others without ever learning to discipline themselves.