



The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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Preventing a Gap Between Teaching and Practice

I am glad to be a part of a church that is not only interested in preventing a gap between teaching and practice but also has successfully, I believe, worked at this and is successfully doing what we will discuss. I would approach the message from that point of view. Individually, I would say that each of us have to say that we have work to do. However, I trust the inspiration will challenge us to continue in

that work.

A gap, as it is given in this title is given as something that is undesirable and something that we should not have or we should avoid. As long as we are in this life, we understand that there will be work to do. As long as we are in this life, we will need to be striving for greater perfection, and a greater degree of holiness and closeness to the Lord.

Teaching as it is used in our

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title, could also be represented by the word “doctrine.” This is probably the closest thing, or sometimes we use the word “principle.” We talk about doctrines or principles. When we compare teaching and practice, the word teaching means what is spiritual, or what is inner (what is inside of us) what controls us or drives us. Practice is rather the outworking or the doing, or sometimes the method as opposed to the principle. The

teaching is the doctrine. The practice is the doing of that, or the method by which that is, or the application. We talk about a principle and the application of that principle. We talk about things that are spiritual and inner. We talk about things that are physical and outward. Practice would be the physical and outward as opposed to the teaching the spiritual and inner.

Thus, having given that background, I would like to answer

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this first question *Why do gaps occur?* 1) *Gaps occur because people tend to have divided loyalties.* Jesus said in Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Remember, God is spiritual. God is right. God is sound doctrine. God is inner. Mammon is natural. Mammon we have to do with, but it is always the outworking, or our stay on God that helps us to work with mammon. We cannot stay on God and mammon both.

Jesus continues discussing in the rest of these verses how this will affect our life. We see how, having our loyalty on God will affect our view of things. Notice verse 25. Jesus says, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life.” Then He ends that verse with a question, “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” We would say yes. In verse 26, God feeds the fowls of the air “Are ye not much better than they?” The answer is yes. Why then, if God can do such things in nature, why can we not trust God to do things for us like making us the size that we are, giving us the clothing that we have, putting us in the time frame that He has put us.

Solomon in all his glory, and all the things that Solomon did were not arrayed, were not outlined, as simply and as logically as what God has outlined our lives and as well as He takes care of nature.

“Therefore,” is given in verse 31, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” That is the primary focus of the heathen, and not the primary focus in our life. If our primary focus in life is, “What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” Or, if this what we are thinking about, and what we are headed for, our loyalties are divided. We are rather to seek “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (verse 33)

In verse 34 there is another therefore. “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” We ought to be a people who trust God. If God was wise enough to put us here and wise enough to sustain us thus far, we ought to be able, in life, to trust Him and stay on Him and not worry about the natural things.

Therefore, we can see that

when people have divided loyalties the things which they teach or say they believe does not “line up” with the things they practice. The apostle James, and his writings were some of the first writings of the apostles to the Early Church. He says, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8) Elijah, in facing the people on Mt. Carmel in his day said, “How long halt ye between two opinions?” (1 Kings 18:21) The figure there is of a crippled man with two unequal length legs. When a man has unequal length legs, if he does nothing about it, he walks crooked. “How long will you halt along that way? If God is God then serve God. If Baal is god then serve him.” Therefore, gaps occur when loyalties are divided. Matthew 6:22, “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” Our loyalties must be singular and fixed on God.

Another reason why gaps occur is that 2) *as men, it is easy for us to teach practice rather than doctrine*. It is easy for us to emphasize the doing, rather than the being. This is another way to say it. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my

Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:21–23) They were doing a lot of good things, but they did not love the Lord. Their hearts were not stayed on the Lord and they were considered enemies of God. They were rejected from the eternal kingdom.

1 Corinthians 10:6–14 is an example where they were emphasizing practice rather than doctrine or teaching. “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” This speaks of the people who came out of Egypt and they were fed water from the Rock. “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (verse 4) “But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” Why were they overthrown? These things are written for our examples. We need to learn a lesson from this. “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of

them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry."

Emphasizing the practice rather than the principle, if it is carried to the end, will be idolatry. I think that we are well enough acquainted with church life to know a little of what that would mean. If we merely talk about being plain, and our heritage, and we really are not an evangelistic minded people, nor concerned that other people find

this way, that does not speak very well for our doctrine. Jesus' doctrine was to win all He could, and to be an evangelistic witness wherever He would go.

Hebrews 3 and 4 give yet another name to emphasizing the practice rather than the doctrine. In Hebrews 3:5–10 what was wrong with them? Down inside of them their principles and doctrine were not sound. They were practicing something which they did not believe. Hebrews 3:11–4:2 "If we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." That is, we have a growing relationship. Notice that it is hardness of heart which teaching practice, rather than doctrine, produces. They could not enter in, not because they were not doing the right things, but because they were not being the right thing. They did not love God in their hearts. We say sometimes, "They were out of Egypt but Egypt was still in them." The question is, do we have faith today? Or, are we living in unbelief and merely teaching a practice without actually believing the principle in our hearts? Such unbelief is sure to bring us to fall. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9) "Let us labour therefore" that we may "enter into that rest" so that

we do not “fall after the same example of unbelief.” (Hebrews 4:11)

3) A *third reason why gaps occur is because we are yet being perfected.* For this reason we open the subject and discuss it with that in view. In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, the discussion is about spiritual gifts. He says this in a setting where people were saying, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas,” (1 Corinthians 1:12) and so on. He said, “Are ye not carnal?” (1 Corinthians 3:4) Then, he said, “There are diversities of gifts,” in other words, there are differences among us, “but the same Spirit.” In other words the same origin and the same end in view. There are differences of gifts. Then in verse 5, “There are differences of administrations.” Of course, the apostle Paul will administrate one way and Cephas will administrate another way, but they have, “the same Lord.” They are followers of the same Lord. Their personalities are different.

Verse 6 says, “And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” Therefore the fact that we are yet being perfected should not disturb us. It should rather strengthen and help us to strive for that same spirit, Lord, and

“same God,” which is given here. The manifestations of the Spirit should not disturb or discourage us. They should rather help to build and bring us together and increase our harmony and unity. It is for this reason that we are being perfected. It is why we can have fellowship with other people who do not have practices that are necessarily exactly like we would practice.

Another question that I would raise in the second part is, “*What is it that gaps in teaching and practice produce, and why is it that we are so concerned about gaps in teaching and practice?*” There are gaps in teaching and practice, where the doctrine and the outworking of that doctrine or the principle and application, produce disunity rather than unity. In 2 Timothy 2:14–18 is instruction to Church leaders who would be especially concerned with these gaps. “These things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit.” That would be emphasizing practices without the principles, “but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will

increase unto more ungodliness.” Notice what they will produce; “They will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.”

When gaps occur, in teaching and practice, and we are not speaking sound doctrine, it actually leads us toward disunity rather than unity. Acts 15:1, 2 gives another illustration. There were some people who came down from Judaea to Antioch and said, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” This was after the first missionary journey where many gentiles were already brought into the Church and the work of the Gospel, or the Word of the Gospel had gone forth into many areas. Many churches were established, and then these people said something like this. “When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.” Something needed to be done when the doctrinal harmony was

disrupted.

In a practical way we must always see a difference in the principle and the application. The principle of the Gospel was challenged in this fact of turning people back to the old covenant. In other words, would the old covenant be binding under the new covenant? The apostle Paul was teaching that it was not binding, and others were teaching that it was. Would that be allowed or would that be counted as sound doctrine? They were not diminishing the principles of purity by teaching that circumcision was not necessary. That was not what was in focus here. Rather, when we teach the application, and we start emphasizing the application on things like circumcision, we start drawing our lines along our applications. We can use the examples of black cars and details of plain dress when we start drawing our lines along the applications and deciding that brotherhood should be based on that. It yields diversity.

There is a book which traces the history of Old Order and Conservative Mennonite groups. There is one chapter, “An Old Way With Many Paths.” We can see as people draw their lines along the applications rather than along the principles it divides them. There is an illustration of

it. *We must understand why it is important that we are doctrinally correct, and then let the applications be worked out.* Whenever a situation develops where we are tending to draw our lines along applications rather than principles, it actually makes us afraid to do anything because we are afraid that we will offend somebody. Whereas, we need to teach the principles of separation from the world and be firm with that principle of separation from the world in one era. Many years ago, in the Mennonite church, was it not considered most practical and most common to drive a white car? That changed somewhere along the line, and now that principle says that separation from the world will be a dark coloured car. This is why we emphasize the principle of separation from the world, or we emphasize the principle of nonresistance. Then, we work it out in our everyday lives and we do not only teach the outworking.

Sometimes, there are issues which arise in church life, or in the church life in a certain country. These issues arise which we must decide how we will relate to them. In relation to the example of nonresistance, will we hire a substitute for us to go to war? This is an issue and is an example of an application. Is it morally

right? If we cannot decide that our own, we have a church which can help us decide. Therefore, we teach the principles and are constant with the principles and the methods. We let them work out as the church works them out and we work with the church on those methods.

Illustrating this further, we teach the principle of separation from the world and say that with our automobiles, in our time period, it is probably not wise to buy a new car. This does not mean that no one may buy a new car. We mean by this that the stewardship principles (not necessarily separation principles) take us toward the used cars or toward the older cars, and toward the cars that are off the cutting edge. By defining our dividing our lines by avoiding cars of class, sport, and so on, we are drawing our lines along principles. These are principles which we can work with and live by. Then, the applications are worked out on a personal and on a local level under, of course, the co-operation of the church.

Again, we have gaps in teaching in practice whenever we teach separation from the world but do not practice it, or do not apply it in our lives, or as a church. When we do not make applications to that it brings us to

disunity or diversity rather than unity.

Another thing that is produced whenever there are gaps in teaching and practice is bondage rather than liberty. Galatians 2 discusses and reminds us of Acts 15 again. We can look at Acts 15:28, 29 where they came to the conclusion, “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.” Notice the language there, “to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.” The way of the cross — yes, it is cross to the flesh, but it is the easiest way to live in this life, because if we do not take the cross we will be burdened with other things. This emphasizes that having a gap between our teaching and our practice will lead to bondage rather than liberty.

Galatians 2:3, 4, the apostle again mentions the subject of Acts 15 where they went to Jerusalem in relation to the circumcision. “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false

brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.” Therefore it is bondage to go back to the practice rather than the principle. Continuing in verses 16–21, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but 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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

True liberty comes as we submit to Christ and to a Scriptural brotherhood. We can look into

chapter 4 and read more about liberty. We study that in chapter 5. “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1) This emphasizes the new covenant and standing squarely on the new covenant, rather than going back and teaching the old covenant. True liberty comes as we submit ourselves to Jesus Christ, the Church and to a Scriptural brotherhood. In such a setting, when we are submitted to the church and to the Scriptural brotherhood it is a joy for us to obey, and conform. It is not a bondage to us. It is liberty.

Titus 2:11–14 speaks about the grace of Jesus Christ and what it does for us. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” This is the grace of God working out in our experience. Anything that does not

come under the teaching of “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,” of living “soberly, righteously and godly in this present world,” or that obscures our view, and our looking forward to Christ’s coming, and brings, or focuses our attention on the here and now, hinders us from wishing for the Lord to return, or looking for His returning. That is bondage not liberty. We are not understanding the teaching (the doctrines) which we are standing on — the doctrine of grace through Jesus Christ. Rather, we merely have a works religion.

The law of grace is given in Titus 2:15, “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Therefore, it is needful that we emphasize the liberty that we have in Christ and that we do not go back to the bondage of the world or of the Old Testament law.

Another thing that gaps produce is a distaste for regulation and order. When there is a gap between the teaching and the practice, if that gap is not working at being closed, or if we become discouraged and let gaps happen, we will become discouraged. People will become dissatisfied with regulated and orderly church life. Some people say that all we need is the Word to

find our way in life. While that is true, it is also true that we need the Word to be applied to our lives. All the people who come along with the doctrine that all we need is the Word, and call any sort of written church standards or applications that a minister or church leader would make idolatry, usually has some of their own revelations, or some of their own applications to Bible principle that they value above any church standard. This is idolatry and it leads to confusion. Along with this teaching comes the idea that the Spirit guides the believer and that the applications the Spirit holds up to us as individuals are greater than all that God has done for us through the church. This actually shows that spirit to not be of the Lord.

This, of course, opens the door for individualism and undermines the principle of a close-knit brotherhood. It is very delusive and deceptive teaching. Perhaps we know some who have been led into the error of taking their own way in life. Maybe we and I are human enough that we can see where we have taken our own way sometimes and the frustration and discomfort that brought to us. We ought to appreciate regulated and orderly church life. We ought to appreciate the efforts that the church

makes to ground our practices on sound doctrine and to make applications for us in church life.

How can we prevent gaps from occurring? First of all, I would like to say that it is by personal integrity. This first challenge begins right down in our hearts. I would like to go to the Old Testament prophets because they addressed people who had a lot of things to say, “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter’s clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be

turned into a fruitful field.” (Isaiah 29:13–17) It is like Isaiah to give a warning like in verse 13, a “people . . . [whose] heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.” It is like Isaiah to finish that with an encouragement to the faithful people.

If we see things like that happening, be calm and wait. There will be a way for the faithful. God’s faithful people have always had a way. “Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?” The Lord is well able to teach us. It is interesting that Jesus used this verse 13 and applies it for us. We do not have to guess what is meant there. Jesus in Matthew 15 (and in the book of Matthew) is speaking to the Jewish leaders. He gives some of His strongest language to them. In Matthew 15:1 Jesus was speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem. These were asking Jesus, “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth

father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (Matthew 15:2-9)

What do we suppose happened inside of those people when Jesus talked to them like that? I think that we are carnal enough and have had the Word of God applied to our heart enough to know a little bit what happened. If we read on we can see what happened. “And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” (Matthew 15:10–13) “Do you not care that

you turned some people away by your sharp words toward them?"

"But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." (verse 14) Jesus was faithfully proclaiming the doctrine that if we draw nigh to God with our mouth and our heart is not true, we will be rooted up. It is a good thing if we are. An older minister brother preached recently. Later a man who is not a member of the church came to him and went up and down over him about calling him a hypocrite and rebellious. The man said he was offended. The older brother said, "I was not thinking of him whenever I said what I did. Actually, I read from Jude 1:19 where it says, 'These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit,' and it offended the man." What happened? The Words of Truth were spoken and the man in his heart knew that he was not living to the standard of truth. He was uprooted. It does not happen to people who are rooted in sound doctrine.

"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. And Jesus said, Are ye also yet

without understanding? Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, [whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (1 John 3:15)] adulteries [looking after a woman and lusting after her is adultery], fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man." (Matthew 15:14–20) If that does not come close home to us we do not know our hearts, because that is where the Gospel begins. It is a challenge for us to be true.

Another one from the prophets In Ezekiel 33:30. I believe it says here at the beginning of the chapter that this is ten or fifteen years after they were carried into captivity. However, the date at the top of my Bible shows that it was only two years after the final captivity, so maybe Ezekiel and some of the people who were carried to Babylon, were there already when they were carried away with one of the earlier captivities. This was after they were carried into captivity. Ezekiel was a prophet and known to be a prophet. He was known to be a

man who would speak the words of the Lord like Jeremiah had back in Jerusalem. Ezekiel was a prophet in the captivity.

In Ezekiel 33:30–33 God is speaking to him and telling him what is happening, “Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.” In essence he was saying, “You know that will come back to haunt them when they must give an account of themselves. They will know that this man was true and he was speaking the truth, but they would not hear.” The depth of truth was that their

hearts were so hardened even in captivity, that they would go and listen to him but behind his back they would not do what he said. They would not submit themselves to God.

It is a terrible curse, when people will come to the house and God, sit and go away mocking. That is the nature of people who are not doing what they practice. We ought to be careful that our practices do not border on mockery, but rather that we, from our hearts, love God and the Church, and are willing and eager to show our support for it.

Jeremiah 12:1–4 is another example from the prophets. “Righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.” Jeremiah recognized that they could talk about the Lord but God was not guiding them. He was not the guide of their life. “But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of

slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.” If we are not the salt of the earth, who will be? The way that we are the salt of the earth is by personal integrity, by being what we ought to be, and doing what we ought to do.

In Matthew 23:4–7 Jesus again rebuked the Pharisees. “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.”

In verse 2 we read, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” In other words, they were their rulers and were over the people. Verse 3, “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” Jesus said that is not only hypocrisy, it

is cruel for us to demand something of others that we ourselves are not able to do. Jesus was saying we can prevent this by personal integrity and by doing ourselves what we want other people to do.

“So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.” (James 2:12–17) One can go to great lengths to try to describe a dead faith, but we can see that does not work.

Therefore, we need, as the old saying says, to practice what we preach and be a rejoicing and a grateful people. I walked into a classroom recently and this saying was on the blackboard, “Nothing is so fitting for an ignorant man as silence, and if he were knowledgeable of that fact,

he would not be silent.” If we do not do what we say, we might as well keep quiet and we might as well live because actions speak louder than words.

Once when I was challenged by a certain brother and I was not sure how to relate to it. I asked counsel of an older brother how I should I relate to the concerns that were given to me. He smiled a little and said, “Well, the brother has a lot of good concerns, but in his way of coming through he offends a lot of people. Sometimes there are people like that. They are well-meaning but they are offensive in the way they speak.” Then, he said, “You know, a man’s children usually understand him. If you look at his children, his children are actually supporting the church and they are about what the church wants. With that, well, we certainly can appreciate the man.” Now, every time I read in 1 Timothy in the outline for church leaders, that he is to be a man “that ruleth well his own house,” (1 Timothy 3:4) I understand then what that Scripture means. A man’s children say something about him. By doing our homework we illustrate our personal integrity and by that give a statement of our faith, and so we are faithful in personal way. I have room to grow in that

and I am thankful. That is one of the reasons I appreciate being a part of a Scriptural church where the brethren teach from the Scriptures. It helps me in a personal way to grow, and that is why I am glad to be a part of a church where the brotherly address is practiced because I believe that my brethren can help me to be what I need to be.

2) *The second thing that will help us to prevent a gap between teaching and practice is sound teaching.* With regard to sound teaching itself, I already alluded to this fact that if we teach things that are vain babblings it will increase unto more ungodliness. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) A spiritual minded man cannot merely take Psalm 16 and read down over it, “Preserve me, O God,” (verse 1) and not receive a message from it. A spiritual minded man cannot take Jesus addressing the Pharisees and saying that they should not require things of others that they do not do themselves, and not apply it to his life. This is what the Word of God does.

It is a mirror like James said (James 1:23) that we look into and we see ourselves. Whenever we teach from the Scriptures or use the Scriptures in teaching, it is like a glass. It is not so much that our teachers are instructing us, yes, they do instruct us how to live and apply the Scriptures to our lives, but they hold up the Scriptures themselves so that we can see ourselves. That is what sound teaching does. I gave the illustration of the man who was offended at the preacher because he thought the preacher called him one who had denied the faith.

In Titus 1:9, there is another example of this, where it is talking about qualifications for church leaders. He says in verse 5 that there are needs in the church, and I am asking you to set things in order. Then, he starts describing the kind of men that he wants to fill these positions. In verse 9 he speaks of those who have been, “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” He is stable. If you want to teach and argue, we know we must argue with sound doctrine, with things that are true, and with things that are becoming to sound doctrine. “But speak thou

the things which become sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1, 2) It is interesting this word, “sound doctrine,” occurs only in the pastoral epistles — only one time in 1 Timothy, one time in 2 Timothy and two times in Titus. It is by sound teaching and sound doctrine that one is to instruct those in 2 Timothy 4:3, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.” In other words, the Scriptures will be so plain that people will actually turn away from it. People will actually walk away from what they once believed was exactly right. Read on in verses 4 and 5, “they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things.” Do not let other people turning back discourage you. Hold fast to what you are taught, “endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” That is the burden of the apostle Paul to Timothy. Although others would turn back, be discouraged and turn aside to vain janglings, he was to hold fast to sound doctrine. This ought to be a challenge to us.

Part of sound teaching is having a clear distinction between the Old and New Testaments. I referred to Galatians 4, and I would also refer to Hebrews 8:13

where this is taught more specifically. In Hebrews 8, he is addressing the Hebrew people who had a problem with the old covenant and how to relate to it. He wrote that there is a new covenant, and whenever he introduced the “new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.” Therefore, the superiority of the New Testament over the Old Testament is a part of sound teaching and sound doctrine.

The Old Testament, as good, instructive, and as profitable as it is to us for all the illustrations of faith, unbelief, hard heartedness and yieldedness, the way God blesses His people, the law God gave to His people and the reasons for the law and how the people related to it, and all the lessons that it teaches us and as profitable as it is “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,” (2 Timothy 3:16) it is not authoritative in the Church. It is the New Testament that is authoritative in the Church. The New Testament became the rule and guide for our life. We are not living “under tutors and governors.” (Galatians 4:2)

We are not living under a church life, where it is like some sort of press that if things get a

little out of hand, the leaders screw the tension down on us a little bit or something like that. Church life does not work like that because we are not in the old covenant and we do not have walled cities. We have the Word of God in our hearts and the Spirit of God in our hearts. Brethren and sisters, if that force does not move us, there is not any Church leader, church discipline, or any alteration of discipline that will to move us. We will need to be inspired from within to love God and to know God and to do His will. Sometimes, simply being willing to submit ourselves to a Scriptural church goes a long way in helping us to get a hold of that life within us. However, I do believe that we ought to be a resurrected people and that we should not be wallowing around too long in the snares that the world is involved in.

Solomon said in his time, in Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” If we will have entertaining speakers, speakers who only entertain us and do not instruct, and do not hold the word of God up for us, if we heap to ourselves, “teachers, having itching ears,” (1 Timothy 4:3) why we will be led astray after the example of others. Remember, “where there is no

vision, the people perish.” Hosea said, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” (Hosea 4:6) Sound teaching is a way to prevent a gap between teaching and practice because when teaching is sound, it moves us to want to follow and obey, and the practice comes along.

3) *A third thing that will help us to prevent a gap between teaching and practice, I will refer to it as spiritual minded living.* We are in the world but we are not of the world. For, “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.” (1 John 2:17) The world is, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” (1 John 2:16) “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4) There are other Scriptures like that which tell us what being a spiritual minded person is. A spiritual minded person is one who thinks on God and has a personal relationship with God. This goes beyond personal integrity. It is having a spiritual view and being a spiritually discerning person.

John the Baptist, in his day, said to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to

flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” (Matthew 3:7–9) Thank God He did have a people who were willing to follow Him even when many of His own people would not listen. “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.” (Matthew 3:10, 11) This is spiritual minded living. The way of the cross is the way of the spiritual mind. Sin is exceeding sinful to a spiritual minded person. It is something that, although it may bother, haunt, and tempt us, we turn away from it and keep it behind us. The carnal nature needs to be put under. The carnal nature has a lot of ups and down. The carnal nature is flattered by success and wounded by defeat. That is something we want to put behind us.

The spiritual minded person is

not discouraged in the face of disappointments. (I still feel the need for it). I remember early in my ministry having a meeting with a man who vehemently attacked one of the older brethren there for the way he had treated him. A few tears ran out of that brother's eyes but his face shone. I wondered how, in the face of such opposition, he could be so radiant with the grace of God. The reason was that he was a spiritual man and though someone did not like him, it did not discourage him at all in the Lord. He was ready for that kind of treatment, and that kind of expression of carnality. John the Baptist said that the self-life must be behind us. The world must be behind us, and we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and understand that all of these things will be added unto us.

A man whose barn burned twenty-five years ago said, "He is glad he never found out who lit the barn." As I remember it, I do not remember that it was conclusively stated whether someone lit the barn, but maybe they did. He said, "I am always glad I never found out who lit the fire, because if I would know, I could never forgive him." Could we, if we would know who lit it, never forgive them? Something is

wrong with our teaching and our application. If we cannot forgive one another their trespasses, how can our Father forgive us? We must be thinking deeply and seriously about the issues of life.

2 Peter 1:2–11 and 2 Peter 3:8–18 tell us what spiritual growth will do for us. In chapter 1 he is talking about the graces that are given in the first verses. If those graces are in us and abound, they will make us, "that [we] shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:8) "But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:9–11) The only way to be a spiritual minded person is to seek God every day, and to seek after Him in life and in the issues of life, and to think about Him whenever we spend our money, acquire possessions, or when we relate to each other. We need to think, "Am I the example that I ought to be? Am I really ministering the Spirit of Christ in the

world?” “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever.” (1 Peter 3:18)

One devout soul seeking guidance asked what the message of God was for him on a particular day. The message came back to him, “God’s will, God’s will to know.” In other words, what is God’s will? The voice was, “God’s will to know.” He asked, “Would knowledge be enough for me?” The voice came back and said, “God’s will to do.” You

need to do God’s will. He was meditating on that thinking, “Yes, to know God’s will and to do God’s will, but is there not something more than to know and to do? And the voice said, “God’s will to love.” When we know God’s will, do God’s will, and love God’s will, when we love God’s way, we will be empowered to do what we know, and God will lead us toward Him.

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From a message by Clifford E. Martin
Sunday, December 12, 2004
Denver Mennonite Church

Mennonite Church Music ITS THEORY AND PRACTICE

By J. Mark Stauffer

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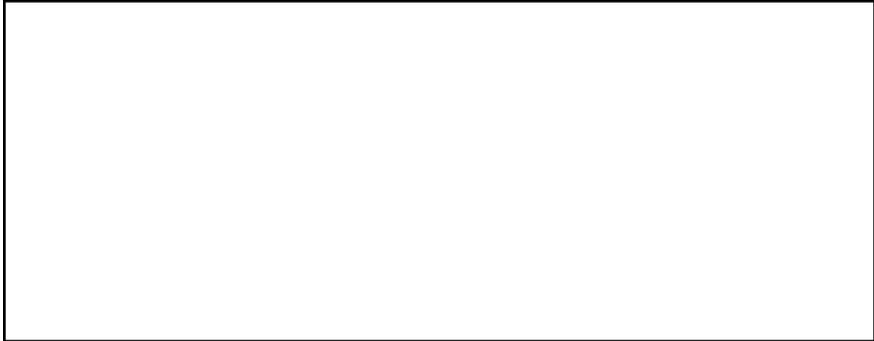
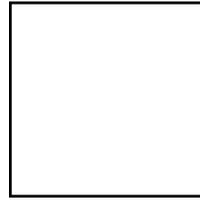
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