

Pure Preaching of the Word

[John Calvin](#)

This sermon is from a Wm. B. Eerdmans' volume which was a reprint of the only sizable collection of John Calvin's sermons translated into the English language since the Sixteenth Century and the only volume ever published in America up to that time (1949). The collection was originally published in a limited edition in 1830 by John Forbes of New York.

But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymeneus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. — 2 TIMOTHY 2:16-18.

WE HAVE ALREADY SHOWN that St. Paul hath, not without cause, diligently exhorted Timothy to follow the pure simplicity of the Word of God, without disguising it. The doctrine which is set forth to us in God's name, to be the food of our souls, will be corrupted by the devil, if in his power; when he cannot destroy it, he blendeth things with it, in order to bring it into contempt, and destroy our knowledge of the will of God. There are many in this day who put themselves forward to teach; and what is the cause of it? Ambition carrieth them away; they disguise the Word of God, and thus Satan goeth about to deprive us of the spiritual life.

But this he is not able to accomplish, unless by some means the doctrine of God be corrupted. St. Paul repeateth the exhortation: that we must shun all unprofitable babbling, and stay ourselves upon plain teaching. which is forcible. He not only condemneth manifest errors, superstition, and lies, but he condemneth the disguising of the Word of God: as when men invent subtleties, to cloy men's ears; bringing no true nourishment to the soul, nor edification in faith, and the fear of God, to the hearers.

When St. Paul speaketh of vain babbling, he meaneth that which contenteth curious men; as we see many that take great pleasure in vain questions, wherewith they seem to be ravished. They do not openly speak against the truth, but they despise it as a thing too common and base; as a thing for children and fools; as for them, they will know some higher and more profound matter. Thus they are at variance with that which would

be profitable for them. Therefore, let us weigh well the words of St. Paul: *vain babbling*; as though he said, if there be nothing but fine rhetoric and exquisite words to gain him credit that speaketh, and to show that he is well learned, none of this should be received into the church; all must be banished.

For God will have His people to be edified; and He hath appointed His Word for that purpose. Therefore, if we go not about the salvation of the people, that they may receive nourishment by the doctrine that is taught them, it is sacrilege; for we pervert the pure use of the Word of God. This word *profane*, is set against that which is holy and dedicated to God. Whatsoever pertaineth to the magnifying of God, and increases our knowledge of His majesty, whereby we may worship Him; whatsoever draweth us to the kingdom of heaven, or taketh our affections from the world, and leadeth us to Jesus Christ, that we may be grafted into His body, is called holy.

On the contrary, when we feel not the glory of God, when we feel not to submit ourselves to Him, when we know not the riches of the kingdom of heaven, when we are not drawn into His service to live in pureness of conscience, when we know not what the salvation meaneth which was purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ, we belong to the world, and are *profaned*. The doctrine which serves to mislead us in such things, is also called *profane*. Thus we see what St. Paul's meaning is: to wit, when we come together in the name of God, it is not to hear merry songs, and to be fed with wind, that is, with vain and unprofitable curiosity, but to receive spiritual nourishment. For God will have nothing preached in His name, but that which will profit and edify the hearers, nothing but that which containeth good matter.

But it is true, our nature is such, that we take great pleasure in novelty, and in speculations which seem to be subtle. Therefore, let us beware, and think as we ought, that we may not profane God's holy Word. Let us seek that which edifieth, and not abuse ourselves by receiving that which hath no substance in it. It is hard to withdraw men from such vanity, because they are inclined to participate in it. But St. Paul showeth that there is nothing more miserable than such vain curiosity: "For they will increase unto more ungodliness." As if he had said, my friends, you know not at first sight what hurt cometh by these deceivers; who go about to gain credit and estimation among you, and with pleasant toys endeavor to please you; but believe me, they are Satan's instruments and such as in no wise serve God but increase unto more wickedness; that is. if they are let alone, they will mar the Christian religion; they will not leave one jot safe and sound. Therefore, see that you flee them as plagues, although at first sight, the poison which they bring be not perceived.

Every one of us should suspect himself, when we have to judge of this doctrine. And why so? Because (as I said before), we are all weak; our minds are altering and changing, and besides, we have a foolish desire that draweth to things which are unprofitable. And therefore let us beware that we do not satisfy our own desires. Although this doctrine may not seem bad to us at the first view, yet notwithstanding, if it has not a tendency to lead us to God, and strengthen us in His service, to confirm us in the faith and hope that is given us of everlasting life, it will deceive us in the end; and

prove to be but a mixture which serveth no purpose, except to take away the good which we had received before.

To be short, those that have not this in view, to draw the world to God, and build up the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may rule among us, mar all. All the labor and pains they take but increases their wickedness; and if they be suffered to go on in this way, a gate is set open to Satan, whereby he may bring to nought whatsoever is of God. Although this is not done at the first blow, yet we see the end is such. To express this the better, St. Paul adds, "Their word will eat as doth a canker."

The word "*eat*," mentioned here, is not commonly understood; it is what the surgeons call, an *eating sore*, and what is also called, *St. Anthony's fire*: that is to say, when there is such an inflammation in any part of the body, that the sore eateth not only the flesh and sinews, but the bones also. In short, it is a fire that devoureth all: the hand will cause the arm to be lost, and the foot the leg, unless at the beginning, the part that is affected be cut off; thus the man is in danger of losing his members, unless there be fit remedies provided for it; in this case we should spare no pains, but cut off the part affected, that the rest be not utterly destroyed.

Thus we view it here spiritually: for St. Paul showeth us that although we may have been well instructed in wholesome doctrine, all will be marred, if we give place to these unprofitable questions, and only endeavor to please the hearers, and feed their desires. Seeing we understand what St. Paul's meaning is, let us endeavor to put this exhortation into practice. When we see men go about, endeavoring to turn us aside from the true doctrine, let us shun them, and shut the gate against them. Unless we take it in hand at the first start, and entirely cut it off, it may be as difficult to control as the disease of which we have spoken.

Therefore, let us not be sleeping; for this is a matter of importance; it will prove a deadly disease, unless it be seen to in time. If this exhortation had been observed, things would be in a better condition at the present day in Christendom. For this doltishness of papistry is but the vain babbling spoken of by St. Paul. Even those who would be counted the greatest doctors among them, who are of many years standing, yea, and have spent their whole life in it, think upon nothing but foolish prattling; which serveth no other purpose than to lead men astray, as no man knoweth what they mean. It seemeth that the devil hath forged this language by a miraculous subtlety, in order that he might bring all doctrine into confusion.

It is plainly perceived that they have conspired to do contrary to that which St. Paul hath in God's name forbidden. For they that have thus turned the Word of God into a profane language of barbarous and unknown words shall be much less able to excuse themselves. Many there are that would gladly have pleasant things taught them; they would make pastime of the Word of God, and recreate themselves thereby; thus they seek vain and unprofitable teaching. They would bring error, contention, and debate into the church, and endeavor to bring the religion we hold into doubt, and obscure the Word of God.

Therefore we must be so much the more earnestly serve God, and continue constantly in the pureness of the gospel. If we have a desire to obey our God as we ought, we must practice that which is commanded us, and pray Him to cleanse the church from these plagues, for they are the devil's instruments. This might be applied to all corruptions and stumbling-blocks invented by the devil; but it is here spoken of concerning the doctrine whereby we are quickened, which is the true food of the soul.

Now let us come to that part of the subject, in which St. Paul informs us who are of this number. He saith, "Of whom is Hymeneus, and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already: and overthrow the faith of some." When he nameth Hymeneus and Philetus, he showeth that we must not spare them, who, like scabby sheep, may infect the flock, but we must rather tell every one, what kind of men they are, that they may beware of them. Are we not traitors to our neighbors when we see them in danger of being turned from God, and do not inform them of it? A wicked man that goeth about to establish perverse doctrine, and cause offences in the church, what is he but an impostor? If I dissemble when I see him, is it not as though I should see my neighbor in danger, and would not bid him beware?

If the life of the body ought to be so precious to us that we would do all in our power to preserve it, of how much more importance is the life of the soul! Those who endeavor to turn every thing upside down, will come and sow their false doctrine among the people, in order to draw them into a contempt of God. These barking dogs, these vile goats, these ravenous wolves, are they that have erred, and endeavored to overthrow the faith of the church: and yet we suffer them. Men will frequently say, must we be at defiance with them? Must we cast them off that they may fall into despair? This is said by those who think we ought to use gentleness; but what mercy is it to spare one man, and in the mean time to cast away a thousand souls, rather than warn them? We must not suffer wicked herbs to grow among us – lest they should get the upper hand, and choke whatsoever good seed there be, or utterly destroy it.

Satan cometh with his poison and plagues, that he may destroy all. We see the flock of God troubled and tormented with ravenous wolves, that devour and destroy whatsoever they can. Must we be moved with mercy towards a wolf: and in the mean time let the poor sheep and lambs of which our Lord hath such a special care, let them, I say, perish? When we see any wicked man troubling the church? either by offences or false doctrine, we must prevent him as much as lieth in our power: we must warn the simple, that they be not misled and carried away; this I say, is our duty.

The Lord would have the wicked made known, that the world may discern them, that their ungodliness may be made manifest to all. St. Paul speaketh of some who are busy bodies, idlers &c.: these must be pointed out likewise, that they may be shunned. What must be done to those who have the sword in hand; who have become very devils; who can in no wise live in peace and concord, but thrust themselves forward to bring all to nought? When we see them thus, must we hold our peace? Let us learn to know them that trouble the church of God, and keep them back, and endeavor to prevent them from doing injury. Hereby we see how few there are that have a zeal for God's church.

We speak not only of open enemies (for we confess that we must name the *papists*, that we be not entangled with their error and superstition), but we see others that seek to turn us away from the simplicity of the gospel: they endeavor to bring all things into disorder; they sow tares, that they may bring this doctrine into hatred, and cause men to be grieved with it; others would have a licentious liberty to do what wickedness they choose, and thus throw off the yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see others, who seek nothing but to fill the world with wickedness, blasphemies, and vileness, and thus endeavor to tread the reverence of God under foot. We likewise see gross drunkards and tiplers, who endeavor to bring all men into confusion.

And yet, who is there among us that setteth himself against these things? Who is there that saith, let us beware and be watchful? On the contrary, those that ought to reprove such wickedness sharply not only wink at it, and let it pass, but they favor it, and give it their support. We see the wickedness that overspreads the land; we see those that endeavor to pervert and bring to nought our salvation, and bring the church of God into doubt; and shall we dissemble, and make as though we saw none of these things? We may boast as much as we please about being Christians, yet there are more devils among us than Christians, if we countenance such things.

Therefore, let us look well to the doctrine which is here given us; and if we see wicked persons trying to infect the church of God, to darken good doctrine, or destroy it, let us endeavor to bring their works to light, that every one may behold them, and thereby be enabled to shun them. If we attend not to these things, we are traitors to God, and have no zeal for His honor, nor for the salvation of the church. We must be professed enemies of wickedness, if we will serve God. It is not enough for us merely to refrain from committing sin, but we must condemn it as much as possible, that it may not bear any sway, or get the upper hand of us.

After St. Paul hath named these two individuals, he informs us that they turned away from the faith, insomuch that they said the resurrection was passed. So we see their fall was horrible. Hymeneus and Philetus were not obscure men; for St. Paul makes mention of them, although they were afar off, Timothy being at this time in Ephesus. It is therefore evident that they were famous men. They had been for some time in great reputation, as chief pillars in the church. But we see how far they fell; even to renounce everlasting salvation which was purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. If we look not for the resurrection, of what use is it for us to teach that there is a redeemer who hath saved us from the slavery of death? Of what use will the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be to us, unless we wait for the fruit that is promised us in the latter day, at His coming?

Notwithstanding these men had been for a season of the number of the faithful, yet they fell, as it were, into the bottomless gulf of hell. Thus God declareth His vengeance toward them that abuse His gospel. It seemeth that these men were drunken with foolish ambition: they sought nothing but renown; they disguised the simplicity of the Word of God, and endeavored to show themselves greater than others. But God esteemeth His Word far higher than He doth man; for if men cast it down and make a

mock of it, He will not hold them guiltless. Thus we see that those who were like angels have become very devils: they are blinded, and yet they would become great doctors.

The ability of these persons, of whom St. Paul speaketh, were not of the common sort; they were not idiots, but of high standing in all the churches: and yet they are fallen into such blindness that they deny the resurrection of the dead: that is, they renounce the chiefest article of our religion and deprive themselves of all hope of salvation. How is this possible! It seemeth strange that men who were able to teach others should come to such gross and beastly ignorance. Thus we see how God revengeth scoffers and scorners that abuse His Word. It cannot be but He must cast them off into a state of reprobation; that they may never be able to discern any more, and become utterly void of all reason.

Therefore, if at this day, we see men become beastly, after having known the truth of God, and become void of reason, we must know that God will thereby magnify His Word, and cause us to feel the majesty thereof. And why so? Because He punished the contempt of it by giving such persons to the devil, and giving him full liberty over them. Therefore we must not be offended when we see those who have tasted the gospel, revolt from the obedience of God; but let it rather be a confirmation of our faith: for God showeth us plainly that His Word is of such importance that He cannot in any wise have men abuse it, nor take it in vain, neither disguise or profane it.

We must learn to take heed, and walk fearfully and carefully. Let us view these things as a looking-glass set before our eyes, that we may see those who seemed to be passing for good Christians, fallen; having in themselves nothing but wickedness, using detestable speeches, having nothing but filthiness in all their lives. Seeing God hath placed these things before us, let us take warning thereby, and awake and walk in the simplicity of the gospel, that we may not become a prey to Satan.

It is true, these men had a fantastical resurrection as some do at the present day; who would make us believe that to become Christians was to rise again: but the Scripture calleth us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that we be always ready and prepared, that He may be made manifest; and until that time our life is hidden, and we are, as it were, in the shadow of death. When the Scripture calleth us to our Lord Jesus, these fanatics say, we must look for no other resurrection, except that which takes place when we are enlightened in the gospel.

We will here observe that our old man must be crucified, if we will be partakers of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, and rise again with Him. St. Paul hath shown us, that if we will be of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, we must be partakers of His cross; we must walk in death before we can come to life. How long will this death continue? As long as we are in this world. Therefore St. Peter saith, baptism is, as it were, a figure of the ark of Noah (I Pet. 3:21). For we must be enclosed, as it were, in a grave; being dead to the world, if we will be quickened by the mark of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They that would have a resurrection at midway, do they not pervert the nature of baptism, and consequently all the order that God hath set among us? Let us learn that until God shall take us out of this world, we must be as pilgrims in a strange country: and that our salvation shall not be shown us until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: for He has become the first fruits of them that slept (I Cor. 15). And likewise, "He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence" (Col. 1:18). It is true that Jesus Christ has risen again; but He must needs appear to us, and His life and glory must be shown us before we can come to Him.

St. John saith that we are sure we are God's children: that we shall see Him even as He is, when we shall be made like Him. It is true, God is revealed to us when He transformed us into His image; but that which we conceive by faith, is not yet seen, we must hope for it at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding the great absurdity of the error, St. Paul informs us that the two individuals here spoken of, have overthrown the faith of some. This is a thing that ought to make us tremble; to think that a doctrine which ought to be laid aside at the first sight should overthrow the faith of some.

We see how the children of God are afflicted in this world; yea, it is often pitiable to behold their situation; while the unbelievers who contemn God, are at their ease, and live in pleasure. They make their triumph, whereas the saints are made as the off-scouring of the world (I Cor. 4:13). How is it possible for men to conceive this heresy: to say the resurrection is already past? And yet we see that this was welcome to some; yea, in the primitive church in the time of the apostles. When they, whom Jesus Christ had chosen to preach His truth throughout the world, still lived, some fell from the faith.

When we see such an example, have we not occasion to be astonished, and walk in fear! Not that we should doubt but what God will help and guide us, but it behooveth us to arm ourselves with prayer, and rely upon the promises of our God. Well may we be amazed, when we think upon the heinousness of this error; that God hath suffered some to be turned away from the faith already. If the apostles, who exercised all the power that was given them from above to maintain the truth of God, could not prevent men from being misled, what must we expect now-a-days! Let us be diligent in prayer, and flee to God that He may preserve us by His Holy Spirit. May we not be puffed up with presumption, but consider our nothingness, for we should quickly be overthrown, if we were not upheld by the supreme Being.

These lessons are not given us without a cause. Although Hymeneus and Philetus are not alive at this day, yet in their persons the Holy Ghost meant to degrade the wicked, who go about to pervert our faith; that we may not be grieved at whatsoever comes to pass; that we may not depart from the good way, but be guarded against all offences. We must not be so puffed up with pride, as to go astray after our own foolish imaginations; but we must take heed, and keep ourselves in obedience to the Word of God. Then we shall be daily more and more confirmed, until our good God taketh us to His everlasting rest, whereunto we are called.

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