

We are living in a day in which the church must sadly concede that modern evangelical preaching has all too often produced ineffectual, unstable "converts." To aid in remedying this condition we have felt it would be beneficial to all earnest Christians to hear again from great preachers of past generations on the subject of "How to Preach the Gospel." With this aim in view we offer the following reprint of one of the letters of John Wesley. Prefacing the words of Wesley is an introductory article which first appeared in an issue of the Message of the Cross.

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Two Errors

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Though modernism [the name given to movements that attempt to define church teachings in the light of modern revolutions in science and philosophy — Am. Heritage Dict.], was not new, it perhaps reached its crest after the first World War. Uninspired leaders at that time set out in earnest to save the world by "another gospel." It resulted in great numbers following these blind leaders of the blind and besides thousands of individuals, even whole denominations forsook the Christ of the Bible and began to follow another Christ, and began to manifest another spirit" (II Cor.11). The devil scored and won a great victory.

Bible believers easily recognized the error of modernism and became militant in their efforts to expose this error. They occasionally became bitter in battle and some of them too, even evidenced "another spirit." The reason for the lack, in some cases, of Christian love is that they were as much in error but in a much more subtle way. Perhaps this error and lack of reality in Christian living contributed to the defection of those who rejected the Bible as the inspired Word of God and Jesus Christ, and the Son of God as only and perfect Saviour!

This other error, dangerous as modernism, is not new either, but it did not reach its crest until about 1945. In two words, it can be called "Easy Believeism." This error is an overemphasis on grace and presents salvation on terms not found in the Bible. The error is salvation without repentance. In fact, a so-called gospel preacher actually the writer that not only is repentance unnecessary, but it is impossible for sinners! He said, "How can a 'dead' person repent? All he has to do is to believe." If a sinner cannot repent because he is dead (in trespasses and sins) how can that same 'dead' person believe? Could the prophets, John the Baptist, Christ, and the apostles be wrong? They all preached repentance.

A good friend, who was a missionary in Africa, said that while he was in this error he had no difficulty in getting converts on the unscriptural offer of salvation without repentance. Many professed salvation but his problem was to get the so-called converts to quit stealing, lying, immorality, etc.! Cannibals, he said, became Christians (?) but they still remained cannibals. The Bible teaches and offers salvation from sin and not merely a technique to avoid hell.

Preaching in such a way as to produce genuine and deep conviction so that sinners are smitten down before God, is almost entirely unknown today. We are giving broad-gate invitations and still expect to see narrow-road Christians. It will never be!

We need to learn the secret of the old time revivalists who knew how to apply the Word of God in such a way that sinners would break down in shame before God in conviction and confession of their sins and their lost condition. Utterly confounded and stripped of every excuse, the sinner would go to any length to justify God and condemn himself. But most of those who "come forward" today are not so; they are so unbroken that they hold their heads high and look the preacher in the face with hardly any sign of real repentance or any sense of shame. There may be a few tears of remorse and a temporary fear of hell but this is not repentance. Real repentance means a change of mind. Sins once loved will be hated and abominated. The old way of life lived for gratification of self will be totally and permanently renounced and the whole being committed to God for future full obedience.

As fundamental Christians we need to examine ourselves to see if we have imbibed this subtle but insidious error. It may be that we were rightly converted ourselves but that in dealing with others we have not rightly used the Word of God. The percentage of those who show no evidence of regeneration among those who have accepted the terms of easy believeism is staggering. A year after some city-wide evangelistic campaigns, only 3% of the so-called converts could be found giving any real evidence of regeneration. Contrast that with Charles Finney's revival in Oneida, New York [early 1800's], where 100,000 were converted and a careful check made ten years later revealed that 85% were still faithful Christians.

Careful reading of the Bible writings of men who knew the secret of successful ministry would help immeasurably. One must also give himself to prayer. We have found a letter written by John Wesley in which he gives instruction as to the application of the Law and Gospel. A study of these principles would be of great help to all who are seeking to attain to better and more effective ministry. We are reprinting Wesley's article entitled, "A Letter on Preaching Christ." May it Bless all who read it. — T.A. Hegre