

**~Other Speakers S-Z: Barton W. Stone:**

**MY SONS:** Hear the advice of an old father, just about to leave you--just about to be discharged from his services in the ministry for nearly half a century. I have been among the early pioneers of the West, in laboring through difficulties unknown to you, to preach the Gospel.

1st. It is a common saying among the preachers of this day, "Old men for counsel, young men for war." This is often advanced in justification of the public debates with opposers, or the clashing doctrines and opinions which now distract and divide the world. "Old men for counsel." Do they counsel you to engage in such debates? Do they laud you for victories won? I will fearlessly answer that no old man of piety and intelligence will give such advice, unless in an extraordinary case. For they know by long experience that such debates tend to strife, deaden piety, destroy the spirit of prayer, puff up the vain mind, annihilate the taste for the marrow and fatness of the living world, and destroy the comforts of true, heavenly religion.

Seldom do we see in the same person a warrior and an humble, devoted Christian. Rara avis in terra. Such acquire a controversial habit and temper. They may proselyte many to their opinions, and greatly increase their numbers; but the children are like the parents, [210] lean and pigmy things, I have known, in the course of my days, great and good religious excitements in certain places, quashed by such debates from the pulpit. I have really thought that the most effectual and shortest way to put a stop to such excitements is for two debaters to propose a public debating match, or an ecclesiastical duel, on a certain day, and at a certain place. Generally at the close of the debate, ends the good excitement.

I know it is said in justification of such debates that Paul disputed in the synagogue at Athens, and in the school of Tyrannus, with the Jews and others.

Read the verse correctly, and the force of the objection is removed. He reasoned, or dialogued with them. This should be the constant practice of every faithful minister of Christ. Would to God it were the practice of all our young preachers to reason out of the Scriptures on the important things of the Gospel.

But "young men for war." What war? Not against flesh and blood, for nothing but carnal weapons can affect them; but against the powers of sin and hell, with spiritual weapons afforded us from above--not against men, but against their sins, as did our Lord and his holy apostles, in order to save them from ruin.

But are we not to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints? Certainly. But cannot this be done without set debates, challenges, judges, rules, etc? Did our great head--did his apostles ever act thus? And who will say they did not earnestly contend for the faith? There must be something wrong in this matter, because these zealous duelists do not like to be called the challengers. Now if this be the proper way to contend for the faith, why not fearlessly challenge every opposer, and thus show your holy zeal?

In these public debates but few persons attend them who have not their minds prepossessed in favor of one side or the other. A few unsophisticated persons may be proselyted to your opinions, but one renewed soul is of more value than a score of such proselytes; and such renewed souls are made by the truth uttered in the spirit, and heartily received and obeyed.

2nd. I advise you, my sons, to preach the Word, the Gospel of the Son of God, with all boldness and humility. If any error or stumbling-block lie across the path of truth, and might neutralize its effect on your audience, labor with cogent arguments to roll it out of the way, without pity for its age, though sanctified by many centuries, and supported by the great and the learned for many ages. But be careful, and certain that it is an error before you touch it with your little finger. Truth, like a plow-share, will tear up the noxious weeds and plants sown and planted by erring man. Be careful not to name [211] any person or people by whom these noxious weeds were sown. The moment you name a Presbyterian, a Methodist or a Baptist as having done it, that moment he buckles on his coat of mail, and shields himself against your arguments, however powerful. You can not profit him by all you say afterwards. "Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

3d. I not only advise you to preach the Word, but also preach it in the spirit. In vain we attempt to preach in the spirit, unless we have the spirit, and experience the force of that truth we deliver to others. A man may preach the truth in the letter without the spirit. Such preaching is vain--useless to saint and sinner. Apathetic and moral lectures on religion have almost ruined the world, and swelled the number of sceptics. For they thus argue: Did these people believe what they preach or read, would they be so cold and unfeeling in their addresses? Would they not cry aloud and spare not? Did you ever know one such preacher convert a sinner

from the error of his ways? A person may also preach with a great vociferous zeal and manner. This may be and often is nothing more than mere animal nature, without the spirit. Live and walk in the spirit, and preach in the spirit; then will the attention of your hearers be arrested, and good effects will follow.

When we see our neighbor's house in flames, and the unconscious family within exposed to instant death, we do not take time to study and write an eloquent speech in order to read it to them, that they may fly from impending ruin--nor do we write a speech to read to persons whom we see ready to rush down a deathly precipice, unconscious of their danger. No; were we to do so, those people would be apt to disregard our admonitions, and perish.

4th. Be as holy out of the pulpit as in it. Be always sober (not morose); indulge at no time in jesting, mirth, nor light conversation; these grow by indulgence. I advise you to beware of what is termed gallantry. It will ultimately sink your influence in the public mind. Be plain, but neat in your dress.

Wear not costly apparel, nor tinsel ornaments of any kind. It savors of vanity, and will detract from your usefulness. Be often on your knees, always endeavor to keep God before your mind, and labor to please him, rather than man; for if you seek to please men, you will certainly displease God. The friendship of the world is enmity to God. Some are tempted to please man by an ostentatious show of learning and talents. This is to preach self, not the Lord Jesus--it is to advance self, and not the cause of Christ--it is to gain the applause of the world, not to save souls from ruin--it is to be popular, not [212] useful. Vain, presumptuous mortal! How despicable in the view of Heaven!

5th. In your public addresses, like the householder, bring forth out of your treasure things new and old. The Word of God is your treasure, not the wisdom of men--with this you must store your mind so as to be able to exhibit to your audience, things new as well as old. Do not forever harp on one string--on one doctrine, however true. The mind needs variety, and that variety is afforded to the Bible student in the Scriptures. "Warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak." You should not preach that to another, of which you do not experience the truth yourself. It will be a dry morsel, unseasoned with grace, both to yourself and those that hear. Avoid every thing, every expression, every smart word that may excite levity or laughter in your hearers. Your object is to save souls; an object truly serious and important, and should be managed always in the spirit of seriousness and solemnity. What! to excite levity in those on the brink of everlasting woe! God forbid!

6th. Beware of an avaricious or covetous spirit. Read Paul to Timothy, 1 Epistle, vi: 6-11. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God! flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Avoid every thing like boasting of yourself, or of your success in the Gospel.

7th. My dear sons; if this advice be good, receive it, and conform to it. I have known it to be good for half of a century. Be diligent and faithful, and soon you shall receive your reward. Oh that we may hear the plaudit of our Lord--Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of your Lord.