

## What's a preacher to do?

Rev. John Belden

I realize some people may be thinking, "This preacher talks about sin an awful lot." Okay, I agree that I have been spending a good deal of time on the subject. But I'm not convinced it's too much time. I believe the old saying that people must hear the bad news before they can understand the good news. It's the bad news itself that makes the good news look so good.

Let me illustrate. Imagine watching the news and hearing about a breakthrough drug proven to cure some rare disease you've never heard of. You might be interested in this, but I doubt you would personally see it as good news. But what if your doctor called you that afternoon with the results of your blood work and said you had that disease? Now it's personal. Suddenly the cure is good news.

The apostle Paul knew this principle well. That's why he spent almost three chapters in the letter to the Romans giving the bad news. He didn't just launch into a discussion of how Jesus loves them and has a wonderful plan for their lives. Instead he opened up with "the wrath of God" (Romans 1:18). He went on to say some of the most uncomplimentary things about mankind you will find written anywhere (3:10-18). He labored to put them all "under the law, that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God" (v.19). Only then were they ready for good news.

Part of preaching the gospel to sinners involves helping people see that they need this gospel. It does no good to hold out free salvation if people do not believe they desperately need saving. This would be like offering chemotherapy to someone who thought he only had a mild headache. In his mind, it's over-kill.

Good news can only thrive in the soil of bad news. Being saved begins with realizing you have been in denial about the state of your spiritual health. It involves being honest about your symptoms. It means looking at the test results of your life and matching them with the disease.

It's hearing the frightening words: "I'm sorry Mr. Jones. You have sin. This disease is fatal. There is no cure among mankind." But it also includes the

hopeful words, "There is one who can save you. He's the Son of God, the only specialist in this field."

Jesus is the only one who can save sick souls. He does this by taking the disease upon Himself. "He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (I Peter 2:24). He subjects Himself to sin's fatal consequence, "being put to death in the flesh" (3:18). His suffering as a substitute cures His people, "by whose stripes you were healed" (2:24). And best of all, His services are absolutely free of charge (Romans 3:24). All He requires is that you come to Him by faith.

A preacher's job is much like a medical doctor's. He must tell people the truth about their condition. He must tell every man, woman, and child apart from Christ that they have cancer of the soul. He must show them the symptoms. He must refer them to the Bible, the only authoritative manual that correctly diagnoses their problem. But unlike a medical doctor, the preacher can offer a definite cure. Once he has exposed their disease, he points them to the Great Physician.

Too many preachers today are guilty of the charge leveled against the false prophets of Jeremiah's day. "They have also healed the hurt of my people slightly, saying, 'Peace, Peace!' When there is no peace" (Jer. 6:14).

What's a preacher to do? Give people the bad news (all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God) so the good news will make sense (being justified freely by His grace, Rom. 3:23-24). The lower the sinner goes, the higher God will lift him. The more hopeless they are in themselves, the more hopeful Christ will be. The more desperate the disease, the more they will sense their need for the only cure.

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