

## **A Limited Message or a Limited Fellowship**

### **By David Nettleton**

“I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” *Acts 20:27*

This message, like many, is born out of an experience. It may be some others are going through similar experiences. Therefore, let me recount the one which brought this message to light.

I was brought up as a Presbyterian. I was saved at a college which was interdenominational in student body, but was managed by the Church of the Brethren. From there I went to a seminary which was not a denominational school, and from there to another seminary which was United Presbyterian. I entered the Baptist pastorate with no Baptist training except that which came from reading of the Scriptures.

A few years later I was drawn into an interdenominational youth movement and was given the leadership of a local Saturday night rally. I cooperated with any who were evangelical, regardless of their associations. I was advised by top leaders in the movement to seek the names of outstanding modernists for my advisory committee. I didn't do that. But I did follow advice which led me to send to all converts back to the churches of their choice, churches I knew to be liberal in some cases. This greatly troubled my conscience and I prayed and thought about it.

Another problem connected with this work was the failure on my part to instruct any converts on the matter of Christian baptism, which in the Scriptures is the first test of obedience. I felt that I should do this inasmuch as Peter and Paul did it. But how could it be done when on the committee of the work there were close friends who did not believe it? By such an association I had definitely stripped my message and my ministry of important Bible truths which many called “nonessentials.”

In the follow-up work it was not convenient to speak of eternal security in the presence of Christian workers who hated the name of the doctrine. Thus the ministry was pared down to the gospel, just as if there was nothing in the Great Commission about baptizing converts and indoctrinating them. I had found the least common denominator and I was staying by it. But my conscience had no rest. Then it was that *Acts 20:27* came to mean something to me.

The great apostle had never allowed himself to be drawn into anything which would limit his message. He could say with a clean conscience, “I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Why cannot many say that today? In my case, and in many other cases, it was due to a desire to teach a larger audience and to work with a larger group of Christians. Many have been carried away from full obedience by a noble-sounding motto which has been applied to Christian work. “In essentials unity, in nonessentials liberty, and in all things charity.” Some things are not essential to salvation but they are essential to full obedience, and the Christian has no liberty under God to sort out the Scriptures into essentials and nonessentials! It is our duty to declare the whole counsel of God, and to do it wherever we are.

Paul had a wonderfully balanced ministry. In his preaching he would never please men, for he knew he could not be pleasing to God if he tried to please men. Yet in his living he testified, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (*1 Cor. 9:22*). “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (*1 Cor. 10:33*). What a happy balance this is in the ministry! It is true, humble, and wholesome.

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Today we are choosing between two alternatives. **A LIMITED MESSAGE OR A LIMITED FELLOWSHIP**. If we preach all of the Bible truths, there are many places where we will never be invited. If we join hands with the crowds, there will be limiting of the message of the Bible. Bear this in mind--it is the Baptist who lays aside the most! It is the fundamental Baptist who makes the concessions! Think this through and you will find it to be true. We believe in believer's baptism. We believe in separation. We preach eternal security. We believe in the imminent coming of Christ. We consider it an act of obedience to reprove unbelief in religious circles. The Sadducee and the Pharisee are to be labeled. But according to a present philosophy we must lay these things aside for the sake of a larger sphere of service.

Which is more important, full obedience or a larger sphere of service? And yet I do not fully believe these are the only two alternatives. It is our first duty to be fully obedient to God in all things, and then to wait upon Him for the places of service. It may be that we will be limited, and it may be that we will not. Charles Haddon Spurgeon did not travel as widely as some men of his day, but his sermons have traveled as far as the sermons of most men.

I have recently read a religious article by a great evangelist. He deplores the moral conditions in America. He deplores the conditions in our schools. He speaks against the liquor traffic and against juvenile delinquency. But nothing is said against America's greatest enemy--THE MODERN BELIEF WHICH GOES FORTH FROM SUPPOSEDLY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES. The strength of the nation lies in her love of God. That love has grown cold in many churches, and Jesus Christ our Lord is called an illegitimate child, a confused young man and a dead teacher. That kind of thing needs to be rebuked at the cost of reputation and even at the cost of life, if need be. But as soon as it is rebuked, the man who rebukes it will lose the majority of his following, if he is gaining that following through cooperation with modernistic churches.

It is my belief that some of our great evangelists today are thorough Bible-believing Christians. They accept nearly every truth in the Book. It seems they refrain from preaching all the counsel of God for one reason. To them, it is important to reach farther even if we reach with a smaller message. The breach within so-called Protestantism today is as great as the breach between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. We need to make this fact known. But every time we promote the inclusive type of ministry we are covering up a fact that needs to be known.

God has given us a great message to preach. It contains the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is not limited to that gospel. He has commissioned us to preach the gospel, baptize our converts and indoctrinate them (Matt. 28:19-20). He has given us the very best system of follow-up work, which is the building of Bible-believing churches and joining converts to them. He is calling us to loyalty and obedience.

We need no new message. We need no new method. We need only the spirit of obedience found in Paul when he testified, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."