

# ***SINS COMMITTED FROM THE PULPIT BY BAPTIST PREACHERS***

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.”  
Mark 10:18

*By Pastor Del Wray*

“Of all the places where a man might commit sin, the worst possible place, in my estimation, would be from the Pulpit.” And yet, across this land sins are being committed by preachers from their pulpits all the time. Lies are told; the gospel is misrepresented; Christ is dishonored. But that’s “them” and not “us.” Right! Well, I’m here to confront you brothers, and to warn you of the sins that might be committed from the pulpit.

As a disclaimer, in no way should this treaty be considered as an indictment or a personal vendetta against any God called Bible believing Baptist preacher who is under the control of the Holy Spirit holding the King James Bible as His final authority in all faith and practice for the local church believer. As to those outside of our ranks you best believe it is and indictment against any preacher who believes he can pastor and serve God without being endued from on high by the power of God. I hold no grudge nor do I have a dispute with any preacher that I know of, God knowing my heart, unless there may be a preacher out there who chooses to dispute or hold a grudge against this preacher and this writing. I never have preached to be popular with men, money and meetings nor have I ever sought to win any popularity contest as most preachers who today come together in meetings to see who may be the big rooster in the barn yard. Although, I expect there will be those who choose to unfriend me over the Word of God and my writings.

Let me say before I continue, if there is one who reads this thesis “without sin, let him cast the first stone.” I’ve chosen to only enumerate a few of the sins that Baptist preachers commit while in their own pulpits. If, I would go to the heart of the matter and expose the corruption that goes on in our pulpits today we all would haft to condemn ourselves and deservingly be in Hell. One verse should be sufficient to tell you what God thinks of all of us. Isaiah 64: 6 *“but we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags.”* Thank God for the revelation of Jesus Christ, for He alone is the only one that pleases God and as we allow Him to live through each of us does He carry on His ministry of reconciliation.

Just a few of the Serious but Subtle Sins Committed from the Pulpit by Baptist Preachers: That’s right! It is possible for you and I to be standing behind what my pastor Dr. Harold B. Sightler always called “the sacred desk,” standing there with your Bible open in a sanctuary filled with saints and sinners who need to hear from heaven, and you stand there and commit sins. Serious sins against God! And serious sins against God’s people!

Now, I will be the first to admit that the word “sins” may be too strong. The word implies intentional immoral wicked behavior. And those items on my list are probably not done intentionally or wickedly by you or me. They may be done ignorantly and well-intentioned.

Perhaps I am overstating it; maybe there is some overstatement, intentional exaggeration in my choice of the word “sin.” But I have chosen that word because I want to communicate to you that these six things are wrong, seriously wrong. They need to be stopped. Immediately! And Completely!

Here’s the first:

### **IT IS WRONG TO MISUSE GOD’S WORD:**

Writing to the Corinthian church, the second time, Paul put it this way:

2 Corinthians 4:2 *“But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, **nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth** commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”*

Men, we must make it our highest aim never to handle the word of God deceitfully, never to misuse, misrepresent, misinterpret God’s Word, but always wanting what we say to be a manifestation of God’s revealed truth. With Timothy, we must 2 Timothy 2:15 “Study” so that we will “rightly divide; properly interpret the meaning of, the Word of Truth.” In an attempt to be clever, or in a desire to be original, or maybe because we have allowed our minds to be saturated with bad examples of biblical exegesis, the meaning of the biblical text is lost; it is misrepresented by the preacher from the pulpit and thus, the Word of God is misused. We cannot approach a Bible text by saying, “To me, this passage means...” That approach always breeds totally subjective interpretations, suggesting that the Bible can mean different things to different people.

Every verse in the Bible means only this, *“what the author original intended,”* and that’s what we’re trying to discover. Interpretation of the Bible is not a matter of personal opinion, feelings, or democratic agreement; it is a matter of gathering evidence from the text and following established principles of interpretation. “First mention principal!” We do not assign the meaning of the text. We discover the meaning of the text through the careful, time-consuming, hard-work of study.

Perhaps the clearest example for how God’s Word is misused by preachers is through **spiritualizing a text**. Let me illustrate. In 1 Samuel 17:40, the young shepherd David is going to face the Philistine giant Goliath. Scripture says, “And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag...” So, a preacher sees that “five smooth stones” and a light comes on in his head! And he preaches that there are five smooth stones that every Christian needs when facing giants: the stone of Jesus, our cornerstone, the stone of courage, the stone of faith, the stone of church, and the stone of Scripture.

Now, I really hope that I didn't just now prepare your next sermon, because that is not the point of 1 Samuel 17:40. I have just spiritualized a biblical text. I have just assigned my meaning to God's Word. I have just handled the word of God deceitfully. I have just failed to rightly divide the Word of Truth. I have just misused God's Word. And yet that happens all the time by preachers. Preachers spiritualize a Biblical text. To safeguard against this kind of mishandling of the Bible are these five simple principles of Biblical Interpretation:

#### The Literal Principle:

The literal principle means interpreting the Bible with the normal meaning of words while recognizing figures of speech like symbolism. God has communicated with us through written language, so we should understand the words of scripture the way we use them in everyday life. Let the text speak for itself. Thus, when Jesus was born, it was a literal virgin birth. The miracles He performed were real. His death and resurrection were actual historical events.

Of course, we understand that many portions of scripture, especially poetry and prophecy, are filled with figurative language. Psalm 91:4 is an example of figurative language in Hebrew poetry. It reads: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust..." This does not mean that God has feathers and wings; rather it provides an image of God as our protector the same way a bird protects its young by covering them with its wings. God does not have wings or feathers literally, but we can literally trust Him to protect us. When the literal principle is used, the Bible is much easier to understand. There is no need to uncover hidden meanings.

#### The Historical Principle:

The Bible must be understood in its historical setting before it can be fully understood in our contemporary setting. Bible students now become historians, seeking to discover the original intent of the author by asking, "What did he mean by what he wrote?" Would our interpretation make sense to the first recipients? Before we ask what a text means to a contemporary audience, we must ask what it meant to the original audience. There are Bible study tools that help us get the historical context of Scripture.

#### The Contextual Principle:

The contextual principle means we should interpret a verse by the verses that surround it. You may have noticed that some verses begin in the middle of a sentence, so it's best to at least go back to the beginning of the sentence to get the flow of the author's thought. Some verses come in the middle of a speech or in answer to a question, and that will affect their meaning. In order to understand the author's original meaning, the Bible must be read and studied in context. A Bible verse standing alone can be misunderstood or misused to prove an error.

When Satan tempted Jesus and suggested that He should throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, the devil quoted Bible verses out of context, giving them a wrong meaning. A psalm about trusting God was twisted by Satan to mean that it's all right to test God Matthew 4:5-6; Psalm 91:11-12. Jesus corrected the devil's error by quoting another text that corrected the error Matthew 4:7; Deuteronomy 6:16.

#### The Compatibility Principle:

The basic premise of this principle is to compare verses or passages of scripture with other scripture to see how they fit together. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible, so we let it interpret itself. When properly understood, the Bible doesn't contradict itself; it complements itself. If an interpretation of one passage contradicts what the Bible says elsewhere, we need to change our conclusions. As we study a text or subject, other portions of scripture shed light on it for fuller understanding. The four gospel accounts all present the life of the Lord Jesus, giving different details to provide a more complete picture of His life. The four authors were like a quartet harmonizing. They were all singing the same song but hitting different notes. Comparing scripture with scripture is a safeguard against error and contradiction.

The Grammatical Principle:

It should not surprise us to learn that this principle has to do with grammar and sentence structure. Recognizing parts of speech and the way they relate to each other can reveal a lot about a biblical text. Identify the verbs in the text, they carry the action. Take note of the tenses. Don't overlook the small, seemingly insignificant, words. Just as great doors swing on small hinges, great truths are often hinged on easily overlooked words like therefore, and, but, that, for, because, and if.

When I am preparing an expositional message, it helps me to lay the passage out in phrases so that I can see the sentence structure and identify the key words. These five principles will help safeguard you against misinterpreting God's Word.

So my first point and the longest one is that **IT IS WRONG TO MISUSE GOD'S WORD**. Misusing God's Word is no different than correcting His Word, changing it, adding to or subtracting from. **RIGHTLY DIVIDING** and **PROPERLY INTERPRETING** the Word of God. Certainly, from time to time, we all make mistakes here, but I want to urge you it is sin not to correctly handle God's Book. A man's attitude when approaching the Bible to be read or for study, and especially for the Scriptures proper proclamation to the waiting needy soul is vital for its transforming power. The wrong attitude in the pulpit is dangerous to both the listeners as well as to the proclaimer. We must be careful for it is right here where God will justly darken the mind of those who mishandle the Word of Truth. God is righteous and knows the thoughts and intents of every man's heart and can either give more light or withdraw light as He pleases leading to a darkened conscience and a lack of proper knowledge to rightly understand what God wants to teach His children.

**IT IS WRONG TO PREACH HYPOCRITICALLY:**

Jesus reserved His strongest words for the religious hypocrites of His day as in Matthew 23. I feel very confident in assuming that there is no one reading here who is living a sinful, two-faced, deceitful life. The hypocrite would not have read this far. I sure hope not. But the kind of hypocrisy that I am thinking of is more subtle than that.

Here's what I mean:

We learn how to say all the right things from the pulpit and even how to portray the right demeanor or attitude when saying those things.

- ✓ We can tell men to love their wives as Christ loved the church.
- ✓ We can teach mothers and dads not to neglect their children, to spend time with their kids, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
- ✓ We can preach about being joyful through every circumstance of life.

From the pulpit, we can teach the proper response to relationship struggles.

We learn how to say all the right things from the pulpit; we learn to portray humility in public. But it is possible that we don't practice the very truths that we teach. We can put on this public preacher persona that doesn't really reflect the way we live our lives. There are preachers who don't love their wives sacrificially. There are pastors who neglect the nurturing of their own children. There are joyless preachers who can preach a great sermon on the subject of joy. There are preachers who can explain what it means to forbear and forgive who are themselves full of bitterness of the way they have been treated by a church member.

And the people who see mostly clearly are the people who live in your house, your wife and your children. How confusing for young minds to hear their father, preach about the family yet not experience any real relationship with their preacher dad. This sin may take years to reveal itself. It may not fully reveal itself until those children are old enough to be on their own. I've met some of those children. I know how they feel about their fathers. We all are guilty one way or the other. I am not saying that you can guarantee that your kids will love and follow Christ, they make decisions and choices of their own, but I am saying the people closest to you need to see you applying what you are preaching to others to your own life. I realize that we preach a standard that is higher than any of us can possibly live up to. But, it is wrong to preach hypocritically. Make sure your preaching is authentic.

### **IT IS WRONG TO BE SELF-RELIANT IN PREACHING:**

The Bible tells the story of King Asa in 2 Chronicles 14-16. He had a lot of good qualities and successes. But later in his life, the Bible reveals that Asa really ceased to rely on the Lord. In fact, Scripture says 2 Chronicles 16:7 that the prophet came to Asa saying, "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand." When there was a military threat, he didn't think of God, he thought of money in the treasury and political alliances and armed forces. When there was a threat to his health, he didn't think of God, he thought of doctors and medicine. When Asa relied on the Lord, God wrought a great victory over a million-man army of Libyans for Judah. But when Asa became self-reliant, even his successes were greatly diminished from what they might have been.

We can become self-reliant in our preaching. We can rely on our own preparation, that's me, I'm a preparation hog. We can rely on how well-crafted our sermon is. Or we can rely on someone else's well-crafted sermon. We can rely on our intellect. I had a preacher friend in heaven now who said to me, "I figure I don't need to study so much because I already know the Bible better than anyone else in my church." How stupid! We can rely on our own cleverness. We can rely on our sense of humor, or our education, or our experience, our own public speaking talent, our giftedness, our charm, or our personality. My list could go on, but I'm sure that you get it. I got it

where did all those things come from? They sure show how wicked we are. Brothers, we must not rely on ourselves. Self-reliance is sinful. It is pride. We must rely on the Lord. No sermon, no matter how well-prepared or presented, will ultimately succeed unless the Holy Spirit empowers and gives unction to it. My best sermons have often been just that my best sermons. I have been amazed when I felt my sermon was seriously lacking something, but God did something powerful in spite, or maybe because of what was lacking in me. It has to be Him or we are in trouble with God. I know that when I am less than confident about myself or my sermon, I am more prayerful, pleading with God to use me, in spite of me.

And I think this is the main idea of this point. Relying on the Lord is done through prayer. Prayer and preaching go together in ministry like peanut butter and jelly. In Acts 6, the apostles suggested the office of deacon so that they could give themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. In fact, you should go through Acts sometime noting the connection between the word of God and prayer. Pray for your own preaching. And, ask your people to pray for your preaching. It is wrong to be self-reliant in preaching. We all need prayerful preaching to maximize the effect.

### **IT IS WRONG TO BE SELF-INDULGENT WHEN PREACHING:**

There is a temptation right here. It is this: People like hearing about you. If I go to here a well-known preacher preach, I really like it when he is personal and informs me about details of his life. I like him, so I like to know about him. So if he says that his favorite sport is baseball and his favorite team is the Baltimore Orioles, that interests me, and I remember it. Our people are that way about us. Their ears prick up with more intense interest when we are self-revealing, our likes and dislikes, our opinions, etc. Because of that natural human tendency, we can easily fall into the habit of preaching an awful lot about ourselves. We tell personal stories that are cute, or funny, or touching, or whatever. I have a friend in the ministry who said to me once that he believes his best gift in preaching is illustrating the principles that he is teaching. And he is good at it. Unfortunately, most of his illustrations come from his own life. And when he starts telling the story, he can start chasing some rabbit trail. And the people that he preaches to love to hear his stories, because he is so nice a man, and people can relate to his stories. Here's the thing: He ends up talking more about himself than he does about the Bible, more about himself than he does about God, or the Biblical text. And even though we all like to get personal insights into the life of the preacher, we need to be careful not to say so much about ourselves. We need to make much of God. To make much of Jesus! We need to make much of God's Word, and only so much of ourselves.

I'm not saying that there doesn't need to be a degree of openness and transparency about our lives. It's possible to be so private that you give the appearance of superiority. That's not what I mean. I'm simply saying that, having such a limited time to expose the minds and hearts of our people to the Word of God, we cannot spend it talking about ourselves, our lives, our opinions, our personal agendas. We need to spend it preaching the truth of God's Word into the lives of our listeners. I think that when we do this right, the people may not say, "Isn't Pastor so and so a great preacher!" They may instead say, "Isn't God's Word precious and so powerful and profound!" Beware of the subtle sin of self-indulgence when preaching. Don't talk much about yourself, but make much of God and His Word.

### **IT IS WRONG TO MANIPULATE THE AUDIENCE:**

I don't think that I need to spend much time on this point at all; I've included it because subtle yet serious sins need to be warned of, sound good to you? These are but a few of the serious sins committed in the pulpit by Baptist preachers. To me I don't need to give it a lot of time other than to remind us of the difference between preaching with emotion and using emotionalism when preaching.

Emotion is a very real aspect of the human soul. We do not have a soul; rather we are a soul, a living soul who has a body and a spirit. The real person is the soul, a mind that reasons and reflects, a will, a volition, that decides, and emotions that feel and desire. I actually prefer the way our Ancestors referred to emotions as affections, rather than as feelings. We cannot and should not deny the emotional aspect of a person. Emotion and passion are certainly an aspect of preaching, and should be. That being said, feelings are the easiest target for manipulation. We must take care, then, when preaching to aim our appeal at the mind and not to, in any way, elicit a decision based on manipulated emotionalism. Danger, too many souls are lost right here. The dictionary defines emotionalism as "an appeal to the emotions, a tendency to place too much value and reliance on emotions." Emotionalism is doing something for the intentional purpose of getting an emotional response. It is aiming for an emotional response on purpose. It is purposely trying to make a person laugh, cry, or feel moved in some way so as to accomplish a desired result. Emotions are involved in our preaching but they are not the essence of preaching. Preach the Word, preach it passionately, call for decision, but don't try to manipulate the decision. It is wrong to manipulate the audience. Be careful not to allow emotion to become emotionalism.

### **IT IS WRONG NOT TO INCLUDE THE GOSPEL WHEN PREACHING:**

Paul wrote, "I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" 1 Corinthians 9:16.

We believe in a Christos-centric Hermeneutic, that is, we approach the Bible understanding that it is all about Jesus. The cross of Jesus is the meta-narrative of the Bible. It is the unifying them that connects all of Scripture. Jesus Himself said John 5:39, "*Search the Scriptures... they testify of me.*" The stranger on the road to Emmaus, who turned out being the Lord Jesus,

"Began at Moses and went through all the prophets, expounding in all the scriptures the things concerning Christ" Luke 24:27. Later, He said to the gathered disciples in the upper room, verses 44-45,

*"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures..."*

**When we are preaching, we must follow the advice of Spurgeon when he said, "Take every text and make a beeline for the cross."**

In a way that is not contrived, that is not clumsy and forced, in a way that is natural, we must connect every text and every sermon to Christ and the cross. Otherwise, we will be preaching moralism, ethics, philosophy, etc. and failing to preach Christ crucified buried and resurrected. It is wrong not to include the gospel every time we preach. Make an intentional and natural connection with the gospel, with Christ and the cross, regardless of text or topic.

It is wrong to misuse God's Word. We must do our very best to rightly divide; properly interpret the Word of Truth.

It is wrong to preach hypocritically. Make sure your preaching is authentic.

It is wrong to be self-reliant in preaching. We all need prayerful preaching to maximize the effect.

Beware of the subtle sin of self-indulgence when preaching. Be careful not to talk about yourself, but to make much of God and His Word.

It is wrong to manipulate the audience. Be careful not to allow emotion to become emotionalism.

It is wrong not to include the gospel every time we preach. Make an intentional and natural connection with the gospel, with Christ and the Cross, regardless of text or topic.

These sins, "wrongs" may not actually be evil in the fact that they are committed intentionally and wickedly by preachers. But they are serious warnings to be heeded when preaching.

You ask pastor, what is your point? Just this, if it's being missed: When a man steps behind the sacred desk if Jesus Christ Himself is not stepping behind that desk too it is high treason against the God of the Bible! If Jesus Christ is not speaking through you it is sin against God! If the Holy Spirit cannot take what is spoken and work in the heart of those believers and sinners assembled it is treason. Jesus Christ must be the preacher, He alone must be the soul winner, and it is He that regenerates life in the dead man. Christ and Christ alone!

May God bless you as you preach the Word!