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## The Mistake of Silence.

Wise preachers often say that they never preach higher criticism in the pulpit. Not so much as to make a reference to it. They are rewarded with smiling approbation from their brethren, and the commendation of all grave men in their pews. The wisdom of their silence seems so self-evident. We know none who advocates critical discussions before a general audience gathered for the worship of God. To enter upon an elaborate defence of the dates and authorship of various scriptures before those who know nothing contrary to accepted beliefs would be worse than beating the air. But is there not a way of meeting the questions that have been started in the minds of thousands who read our papers and magazines without going into the details of modern controversies? Nothing impairs confidence as to the sincerity of preachers in the minds of thinking people more than their blank silence on the debated questions of the Bible's trustworthiness. One of the conditions of winning the respect and confidence of people is frankness. Suppression breeds distrust everywhere. Any one who refuses to recognize what is said outside the limits of strictest belief will never mold the opinions of the young. This is not saying that speculations and vague doubts should be preached. Not at all. There are questionings in a thousand minds who love Jesus Christ in sincerity, which may be answered to the great peace of those who hold them, by occasional and incidental suggestions and explanations concerning those matters of doubt. Every preacher should do what our Lord did, direct his words to the hidden and unexpressed thoughts in the hearer's heart. The Apostles anticipated and answered question of difficulty about Christ and the resurrection. Their preaching was argumentative, and dealt with the religious controversies of the day. So should ours. But it is said to preach on such things will start doubts in minds never accustomed to them. If this were true, it is not nearly so serious a thing as to let doubts fill and cloud other and stronger minds without making an effort to clear them away or even indicating a knowledge that such exist. It is possible to assure minds concerned about the verity of the scriptures by letting in a little light on difficult problems incidentally without devoting a whole discourse to them.

## The Personal Factor.

It is only a truism to say that the personal factor enters into all human concerns. In every yard of cloth and every ingot of steel the personality of the worker influences the product. Whatever may be the force otherwise arrayed, it is the man behind the gun who wins the victory. We may seek to estimate externally the element of power in him who moves us by oral or written word, but in the last analysis, it is the personal factor behind each that achieves permanent result. Sometimes the fact indicated is lost sight of or is not valued at its true worth. That it should be thus valued is sufficiently apparent to those who think. "What you are," mentally said a distinguished hearer of a speaker, "thunders so loud, that I cannot hear what you say." Unquestionably, too often, this lack of consistency exists. What the man is destroys or lessens the value of that which he delivers or does. It is useless for one to seek to make his message attractive if he himself is repellent. It is effort expended in vain for one to seek to exalt his Lord if he thrusts him persistently before Him. His ringing sentences will be in vain if there is good reason to question the speaker's sincerity. It is of little use for him to declaim on the beauties of unselfishness if he himself incarnates the opposite. Of what avail will it be for one to exhort to courage if he himself is known to be a coward? How shall the clergyman exercise the

ministry and helpful functions which have been committed to him if behind them all is his own inconsistency? "Do not send for him," exclaimed one who was dying, when a certain minister was mentioned who might kneel at his side. Some inconsistency had attached itself in his thought to the man which destroyed for him forever his value as a minister.

All this indicates no light task for him who assumes the position of instructor and helper to his fellows. He may fancy that he is called thereby to a life of separateness and self-denial unwarranted by the facts of the case. But after all, in our deepest consciousness we know that he is not. We know that one who assumes the function of teacher should in some real sense be beyond those whom he would instruct. He must be some true measure be an example of that which he commends. If he is not, his words will be as little effective as the aimless drumming of a child. In our strivings then to correct things, to discover the secret of perhaps a diminishing power with the people, let us not forget to look in the direction of the personal actor. In our devotion to the ministry, of whatever kind, it may be, let us not forget the man. He is, or should be, greater than the message he delivers. If he is not, his message will little avail.

## Settling Difficulties.

The Lord once spoke concerning offences, and told His disciples of a method of adjustment. It is a great help to have a wise rule in settling difficulties which inevitably arise in life. Christ knew enough of the common infirmities of men and their difficulties in living together on terms of harmony and friendship to foresee the necessity of such a rule. He said: "If thy brother sin, go show him his fault alone; if that fails to bring about reconciliation, lay it before the church; that is, the brotherhood, and if when even this fails to effect peace and forgiveness, leave the offender to himself and have nothing further to do with him." This conclusion does not mean that you have right then to hate him, or to go about slurring his character, or seeking your revenge upon him. Just let him alone and keep your mind free from prejudice and bitterness, and be patient and generous. We do not think this rule of bringing the matter before the church in case private efforts fail contemplates churches as large as many are to-day. It is a questionable method to bring personal grievances before a meeting of hundreds of people. Many churches have been wrecked in that way. A few are better than many in adjusting troubles. It is easy to inflame a whole church by the introduction of personal disputes. Fervent speeches and censorious judgments are quickly stirred. These are sometimes called little foxes that spoil the vines. The comparison is too mild by half. Call them barbed and poisoned arrows shot at the heart, which bring not only stings and sores, but death itself.

If it is unwise to bring personal offences before large congregations of Christians, it seems to us just as unwise for churches, which have troubles too difficult for them to adjust themselves, to call large councils. In matters of ordination large councils may be wise, but when the question of offences is involved, it is better that they be handled by half a dozen rather than by half a hundred.

## Is the Lord Among Us?

It was in a querulous and disbelieving spirit the people asked this question when the supply of water failed them in the desert. Their question, however, was a legitimate one, if it had been asked in a right spirit. It would be helpful

for the churches if they inquired with sincerity whether the Lord is among them or not. The presence of Jesus Christ is assured by his promise, and the existence of a spiritual and earnest church is an attestation of its fulfillment. But the abiding of the Lord is determined by his church's attitude towards him. "The Lord is with you while ye be with him." There were times in Israel's history when there was a withdrawal of the presence of God, and more than once were they withheld from some proposed action by the warning, "Go not up, for the Lord is not among you." God's presence is variable, but its variability is not the result of changed purpose or action on his part, but is made so by waywardness and disbelief on our part. In a deep sense it may be said God is always with us, and never forsakes us. Even the wickedest may be followed and moved upon by the Spirit. But, though the language seems to contradict this truth, we yet speak with painful truth of the lost presence of God. The consciousness and power of it are gone. "Hereby shall ye know that the living God is among you." In what way? Their victory over the Canaanites and others, and their possession of the promised inheritance, was the attestation of it. It was a sealed and material proof that God was among them. We seek other signs than these. It is spiritual power and progress which alone can satisfy us as to His being among us. When apathy is upon the people, when the pews are unfilled at the hour of prayer, when believers are without vital interest in spiritual things, when none are turning to the Lord in sorrow for sin, then is there need to ask this probing question, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

## Doubt and Sadness

When Jesus met the disciples going to Emmaus he noticed the sadness there was in their faces. Many would have seen them engaged in earnest talk, but would not have noticed they were sad. Jesus had a quick eye for reading the story of the heart's sorrow. It was because of his intuitive sympathy. There are people of large and tender nature who detect hidden griefs where sterner and colder people see only smiles and laughter. The disciples were sad because doubt had displaced faith. Nothing proves their sincerity better than their sadness. We meet many who say they have lost faith in Christ, some for one reason and some for another. They are all insufficient reasons and not a few little other than childish. They have been deceived by a member of a church, or have had their feelings hurt through neglect or slight and as a result their faith has withered like a late rose at the touch of a November frost. But we notice that only a few of the people who say they have lost their faith look sad over it. They are often bitter enough and proficient in self-excusing, but their faces have no touch of gentle and mellow sadness in them. When a real disciple loses faith in Jesus we think, you will see the tale in a sad face. Sadness is always an accompaniment of an eclipsed faith in the case of those who truly loved and trusted him. When you hear light-hearted, irreverent, conceited ones telling how they no longer believe in Christ you may be sure they never had much faith in him and still less love. A genuine Christian who unhappily has become troubled with doubts is always sad. His sadness is the best proof of his Christian sincerity.

## Try It.

Some one has given this good advice. It is worthy of being memorized: Sit less-dig more. Eat less-walk more. Waste less-give more. Write less-read more. Worry less-work more. Clothe less-bathe more. Drink less-breathe more. Preach less-practise more.