

The Heart of a Gospel Preacher

by Bryan Gibson

What follows is God's description of a gospel preacher's heart—a **faithful** gospel preacher. Most preachers, including this writer, will humbly acknowledge shortcomings, but this is indeed the **ideal** for which we are striving. Perhaps this will help preachers, but hopefully it will also help other Christians better understand their work (and heart).

First and foremost, his heart is set on pleasing God (Galatians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:4). Sure, he needs to know his audience, but he can't possibly know the sensitivities of every person. He must preach the truth, then hope and pray that humble hearts will receive it, regardless of how "offensive" it may seem. "Seasoned" speech (Colossians 4:6) sometimes necessitates a more tactful approach, but he can't possibly "flavor" it to everyone's liking.

As much time as He spends in God's word, "which is a discerner of the thoughts of intents of the heart," he should know very well his own shortcomings/sins. Sermon selection, then, is not always based on what you need, but on what he needs. He knows exactly what Paul means when he said, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Speaking of those same shortcomings/sins, he's much more approachable on those than you may think—on matters pertaining to both his preaching and his life. He may even need your rebuke, and if his heart is right, he'll express the same sentiment the psalmist did: "Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it" (Psalms 141:5).

He, too, has a strong emotional attachment to **your** children. He has prayed for them, preached to them, taught them in classes, and given them private words of encouragement. Nothing, then, gives him greater joy than to see them (and you) walking in the truth, and nothing makes him sadder than to see them go astray (3 John 1:4). Don't ever underestimate how much his well-being is tied to theirs—and yours ("for now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord"—1 Thessalonians 3:8).

Those hard sermons, those words of warning and rebuke—he doesn't preach them with pleasure, but "out of much affliction and anguish of heart" (2 Corinthians 2:4), not to destroy, but to edify (2 Corinthians 13:10). In short, he preaches those things because he loves you ("that you may know the love which I have so abundantly for

you”—2 Corinthians 2:4; see also Revelation 3:19). If it seems he’s preaching those type lessons a little too much, just remember—he may see some present and future dangers you don’t (“for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears”—Acts 20:31). Balance is important; preaching the whole counsel of God is critical; but please be patient, because certain times call for certain lessons (1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13). Speaking of balance...

As difficult as it may be, in his heart he strives to combine the best characteristics of both a mother and father (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11). He longs for, nourishes, and cherishes his children; but he also exhorts, charges, corrects, rebukes and warns. It’s all important, so don’t appreciate one side to the neglect of the other.

If it sounds like he absolutely hates false doctrine, it’s because he does; he hates it because he loves the truth (“all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way”—Psalms 119:128). False doctrine destroys those he’s trying to save, so if his heart is right, he may even “burn with indignation” (2 Corinthians 11:29).

Finally, if he has the right kind of heart, he “will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls;” and so it does sting when the more abundantly he loves, the less is he loved (2 Corinthians 12:15). When those who once loved him now regard him as an enemy (Galatians 4:14-16), it grieves him. Bitterness and vindictiveness find no place in his heart, but the encouragement once offered would still be most appreciated. He longs to hear the same words spoken to Ezra, who too faced a most difficult task: “We also are with you. Be of good courage, and do it” (Ezra 10:4).

“You are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (2 Corinthians 7:3).

“But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus” (2 Corinthians 8:16).

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16).

**Personal note: I originally prepared this article many months ago, wrestling ever since about whether or not I should publish it. What I feared is that some might view it as entirely self-serving. Does it strike a chord with me personally? Absolutely! But, if it helps my fellow-preachers and I develop the right kind of heart, and if it helps facilitate a better understanding between preachers and their brethren, it will have served a great purpose. May God help us all to develop the heart of our Savior.