

It Is Written

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THE DEAFENING SILENCE OF THE PREACHERS

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Jeremiah was set in place by God as His prophet to Jerusalem, Judah, and the nations. Using God's word, Jeremiah was commissioned by God "to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:4-5, 9-10). When severely persecuted for speaking God's word to rebellious Jerusalem, Jeremiah considered being silent rather than speaking "anymore in His name" (Jer. 20:9). God's prophet was tempted to refrain from speech that was sure to bring him rejection, mockery, imprisonment, and death threats. He did not yield to this temptation. Instead, Jeremiah was emboldened in faith to continue to open his mouth and speak the inspired word of God: "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:9). Although friends and foes opposed him, he rested his confidence in the Lord's presence, power, and justice, and kept on preaching God's word (Jer. 20:10-12, 9).

Jeremiah is a worthy example for every Christian. We live in an age of moral defiance and open rebellion against God and His holy standards of conduct. Marriage has been redefined legally in America to include same sex relationships. The taking of innocent life has been redefined to be a woman's right to choose her reproductive health, while the unborn are relegated to little more than a footnote, an appendage, a mass of cells. Mind-altering substances like marijuana are being legalized, joining the ranks of alcohol and other drugs as people recreate or try to cope with problems by escaping reality. In religious circles, sin is redefined out of existence. The Scriptures are ridiculed and dismissed as mythical, outdated, and irrelevant. By many, faith is reduced to a money grab as they preach a prosperity theology that serves the flesh (1 Tim. 6:6-10). The result is cynicism toward religion by many, often with good reason.

The question before us is whether we will raise our voices against the prevailing winds of sin and unbelief, or fear men and be silent? In silence, will we "go along to get along" with this present evil world? Or will we suffer reproach for the name of Christ (1 Pet. 4:16; 3:13-17)? What would Jeremiah say and do today? He would not be silent.

Jeremiah is also a worthy example for gospel preachers, the men who devote their lives to proclaiming the word of God to a lost and dying world. These are obliged before God to "preach the gospel" without fear or favor (1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Tim. 4:2-5). Gospel preachers are to boldly speak the whole counsel of God, not avoid its full proclamation (Acts 20:27). They are not to be hirelings who remain silent in the face of sin, error, and spiritual danger (John 10:12-13).

We should not have to wonder what a preacher teaches and where he stands on the soul-affecting subjects of the day (2 Tim. 4:1-2). But preachers can become silent rather than using "great boldness of speech" to preach the word (2 Cor. 3:12; Phil. 1:20). Jeremiah did not have that problem. Like God's prophet, a gospel preacher must, at times, stand against the tide of public opinion and unbelief among God's people. Of course, this is not only true of gospel preachers. It is also true of elders, teachers, and every saint who has the Christ-given work of building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

When preachers are silent instead of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, divine warnings against sin in all its forms (including false teachings and immorality) go unheard and unheeded. No preacher should ever be heard saying, "There is no need to preach on that subject because we do not

have that problem here." That is exactly what our adversary, the devil, wants; the silence of the preachers! Be assured, fellow preacher, if you are not preaching on subjects because they are not current problems where you live, they will eventually become problems. And brethren will be ill-equipped to address and overcome them, in part, because of your silence (James 3:1; cf. Ezek. 3:17-18). Consider these applications to illustrate this poignant, if not prevailing, problem.

Marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Now, that's a topic from which many preachers run. When was the last time your preacher preached on divorce and remarriage from the pulpit? Some preachers will not do so. They reason like the world: "That is a subject for classes or private study, not the pulpit." Perhaps Jeremiah should not have preached publicly against the adultery of his day (both physical and spiritual, i.e., idolatry; Jer. 3:8-9; 7:9; 29:23). From time to time, I am asked what a preacher teaches on divorce and remarriage. More than once I have had to reply, "I do not know; they have nothing in writing or on record to go to and find out." That should not be the report concerning one who preaches the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20, 27). I know that not every preacher writes, and not every preacher has his sermons recorded for public distribution. But when a preacher is published and prolific on many other Bible subjects, yet nothing can be found on a controversial subject like divorce and remarriage, it is mighty strange. Such silence enables doubt, sin, and compromise with error to spread. Furthermore, when one does speak up and preach the truth of God on the subject, he is liable to be branded a "radical," a "troublemaker," and an unloving "extremist" unworthy of being heard. That sounds much like how the opponents of truth reacted to Jeremiah's preaching (Jer. 26; 37:11-21; 38:3-6). For some preachers, it is safer to be silent. The silence of the preachers is deafening.

Fellowship with error and those who teach it. One aged preacher advised a young preacher not to preach on fellowship, for that was sure to cause trouble. And so, preachers become silent. Fellowship is joint participation in spiritual work because of shared principles of truth (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Phil. 1:5; 4:14-16; 1 John 1:3-7; 2 John 9-11). Fellowship has been broadened by the false teaching that Romans 14 permits unity when differences exist on "matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import" ("The Bounds of Christian Unity," Ed Harrell, Christianity Magazine, May 1989, 134). Many preachers remained silent when this error arose in the 1980s-90s. Those who rejected it were castigated as troublers of Israel. Now, divorce, remarriage, and other matters of morality and doctrine are increasingly viewed as secondary issues that should not affect fellowship and unity. But Scripture says we are to mark and avoid those who teach error and cause division (Rom. 16:17-18; Eph. 5:11). Which error? That which is "contrary to the doctrine which you learned" (i.e., revealed truth, Rom. 16:17; Gal. 1:6-10). The silence of the preachers is deafening.

Space fails to speak of the silence of the preachers on immodest clothing, social drinking, who is a false teacher, and more (Gen. 3:7-10, 21; Exod. 28:42-43; 1 Tim. 2:9-10; 2 Pet. 2:1-3; Jude 3-4). Jeremiah's warning remains appropriate: "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end" (Jer. 5:31)?

Is your preacher silent when he should be proclaiming the whole counsel of God? If so, ask him why. Urge him to fulfill his ministry to preach all of God's truth (2 Tim. 4:5). Jeremiah had a fire in his bones that induced him to preach God's word. He could not be silent (Jer. 20:9). Neither will faithful gospel preachers be silent today (1 Cor. 9:16; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; James 5:19-20).