

Preaching the gospel is a God-given task to be undertaken by those men who have the knowledge and ability to communicate to the hearts of men the mind and will of God.

Preaching certainly needs to be biblically sound in its content and ably delivered. But nothing is more critical to success in declaring this life-transforming message than the godly character of the one proclaiming it. Preaching is not a profession but a function of being a disciple of Jesus. The most important thing about those who preach is not that they are preachers but that they are devoted Christians. That certainly is the ideal but there is no myth so widely held as the idea that those who spend their lives preaching the gospel are somehow insulated from the temptations that assault other disciples. To the contrary it may be true to say that they are confronted by it even more. **Behind the Preacher's Door** is a book that faces this reality squarely and candidly and offers both warning and wise counsel in meeting and overcoming the challenges with which preachers struggle. This is a book that has been long needed and we commend Warren Berkley and his writers for their diligent work in producing it. Preachers young and old will read it with great profit.

– Paul Earnhart

**BEHIND THE PREACHER'S
DOOR**

Edited by Warren Berkley

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– *Warren E. Berkley*

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Why This Book?

Warren E. Berkley

Speaking to a group of young preachers a few years ago, I gave them a sad review from my own personal knowledge of preachers who had fallen. At the time I had been preaching for 38 years (5 churches, over 100 gospel meetings, work outside the country in two locations, over 30 years experience in “brotherhood journalism,” and contact with many preachers through **Expository Files** and **Preceptor**). I had to report to these young men that I personally knew of 52 preachers who committed sexual immorality. That’s just one of the problems addressed in this book.

Adding Some Perspective: *I’ve known 4 men to leave the truth for Calvinism; 3 to embrace what I believe is error on divorce and remarriage; 2 to change directions into the institutional movement; 4 whose wives left them; 3 who suffered financial crash (with legal trouble); 1 who was too discouraged and depressed to continue in local work; 1 who committed suicide; 2 who just quit serving the Lord, and other sad stories. But beyond these, 52 who fell into sexual sin (I spoke to those young preachers about this in 2008, I must now add two more). **That’s 54!***

But that figure is not **just** 54 preachers. *This figure translates into at least 54 local churches, 108 families,* and I don’t want to calculate how many children, parents, extended family, friends, and other churches have been hit hard by the sin of these preachers. And sadly, in some communities these episodes have been covered by local news media. In one case, the national news media exposed the transgression. The rate of such events is alarming, even when we factor in the most optimistic realities that this is a guilty minority. [As Frank Jamerson reminds us, “. . .the vast majority are diligently trying to teach the truth and exemplify it in their lives.”]

Outside of our brethren, you’ll hear reports of 1,500 “pastors” leaving “the ministry” due to moral failure. One source says that 50% of

“pastor’s marriages will end in divorce,” and “almost 40 percent report that they have had an extra-marital affair since beginning their ministry.” Shall we try and convince ourselves that we are so different from the world? We should be.

(Sources:http://blog.worldvillage.com/society/reframing_pastor_burnout_and_pastors_leaving_ministry.html; http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm.)

There is a problem. Preachers need to face it; those who train preachers need to attend to it; in fact all Christians need to see the matter clearly and uphold and model the discipline that is so greatly needed. Preachers need to talk about it – not as gossip but as reality, an issue to be addressed through a faithful use of the Word. All of us striving for purity need a book like this, but most importantly, men just beginning to preach need to have this kind of book and give healthy thought to the varied content of these chapters.

So this is NOT a book about how to prepare sermons, pulpit dynamics, study methods or the use of PowerPoint. While all of these things play a role in the preacher’s public work, there are books and venues directed to these purposes. *This book is about what happens behind the preacher’s door.* These chapters put the spotlight on heart, life, private thoughts and relationships, using the Bible to teach and warn all preachers and all Christians. It is the purpose of this book to not only sound some alarms, but to supply forceful preventive teaching. You will read not only about adultery, but financial crisis, wasted time, neglect of family, and abuse of brethren. Everything Paul warned Timothy to shun!

Why this book? To apply Bible teaching to help preachers, and others, train their conscience, heighten their awareness of temptation, enrich their daily discipline, and become men of God in and out of the pulpit. Even the mass of good faithful men will be better equipped and enabled to meet future temptation by reviewing the teaching on these pages.

Foreword

Frank Jamerson

One of the brothers of our Lord wrote, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (James 3:1). We know that God is no respecter of persons and He does not classify sins as being worse if they are committed by preachers, but we should realize that those of us who publicly proclaim God’s word have a special responsibility to exemplify what we teach. Teachers, by the very nature of their work, have greater opportunities to say one thing and practice another. The apostle Paul wrote concerning his Jewish brethren, “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery’, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” (Romans 2:20-22). Then he concluded that God’s name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the action of those who claimed to be God’s people (verse 24). I have heard it said, if you can’t preach better than you can practice, you are not worth listening to, but brethren, if we don’t try to practice what we preach, we are not fit to listen to. A hypocrite is not simply one who makes mistakes, but one who is a play-actor. He is pretending to be what he is not, and Jesus described such action as “whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). Not a very pretty picture!

It has been my privilege to read the manuscripts of this book and make some comments about the various problems faced by preachers that are discussed in it. Some of these problems were unknown to those of us in the older generation, but we live in a new age, and need to be warned about new dangers as well as the old ones that have always assaulted God’s servants. Instant communication can be good or evil, and it is often used for the latter. These men, who have been asked to write various chapters have not written from a spirit of self-righteousness but from genuine concern over the loss of so many comrades. You will find everything from planning

time for personal spiritual growth to preparing lessons; teaching on moral purity and friendship with the local church and special friends; dangers and benefits of technology available to us, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of being married and the responsibilities to our wives and families if we are married. All the men have presented Scriptural teaching as well as beneficial lessons from their personal experiences and wisdom.

No doubt, none of our brethren who have fallen ever thought it would happen to them. When we are deceived into thinking Paul's admonition, "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12), does not apply to us, we let down our guard and the devil seizes the opportunity to take advantage of our over-confidence.

Young men, especially, need to be warned about putting themselves in a position to be tempted, or to even be accused of impropriety. Several young men have worked with me through the years and one thing that I tried to impress on them is not to take chances with their reputation. Keep the door closed for temptation, by never going behind a closed door alone with a woman, even if you do not foresee any problem. If you avoid the possibility of temptation, you will avoid being overcome by it. Society today is not the same as it was when many of us were young preachers and we must train our young men to "abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22), and as much as possible, even from the opportunities to do evil, or to be falsely accused.

As you read these chapters, you will probably think, as I did, that this kind of teaching should have been published long ago. Not only preachers, but all Christians can benefit from the excellent articles these men have written. They have warned not only about being overtaken in a trespass, but the attitude we should have when overtaken, and the attitude we should have toward those who have been overtaken. Too many times, when preachers, who have faithfully served God for years, are overcome in some sinful action, they become embittered, because they feel brethren have not treated them the way they should have been treated when they repented, and bitterness breeds all kinds of rationalizations which enable them to teach and practice things they would have never considered otherwise. In reading this book, we should remember that mistakes can make us bitter or better, depending

on our reaction. Being mistreated does not justify destruction of previous good, or failure to do great things for God in the future. Remember that at one point Peter said, “even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble” (Matthew 26:33). Satan took advantage of his overconfidence and Peter denied his Lord three times. When the rooster crowed, “Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ Then he went out and wept bitterly” (Matthew 26:75). The lesson we need to learn is that he did not become bitter because of his failure. Bitterness destroys its victim. Peter got up and started over by earning the respect of his fellow apostles, and we remember him as the great evangelist, who stood with the other apostles on the day of Pentecost and addressed thousands with the glorious message of the resurrected Christ. Judas, who also allowed Satan to enter him (Luke 22:3) and take advantage of his weakness, was unable to face his guilt, and went out and committed another wrong. He is not the last servant of God to react in the wrong way toward being overtaken in some sin.

Many, or maybe I should say all of us, have made mistakes and been mistreated by brethren. When I was a young preacher, some of the members where I was working were not doing what I believed they should be doing, and it was very discouraging to me. I was considering moving, but when a beloved brother, James Cope, came to town I dumped my problem on him. Although nearly half a century has passed since that day, his comments to me are still clearly embedded in my mind. He said, in nearly these words: you don’t build anything by majoring on the weaknesses. If you major on the weaknesses of your wife, your marriage will soon be on the rocks. If you major on the weaknesses of your business, your business will fail. If you major on the weaknesses in the congregation, you will fail. He said we must major on the good points and minor on the weak points. We should try to build up the weak points, but they should not consume us. When he said that, I realized that two or three people were the ones who were getting all my attention, and over one hundred other people were being completely overlooked! We should realize that some will not be faithful, in the time frame we would prefer, but many are conscientiously trying to grow in Christ. The same is true of our preaching brethren. A few have not taught or lived as they should, but **the vast majority are diligently trying to teach the truth and exemplify it in their lives.** They are not behind

closed doors, but their lives are open for the scrutiny of any who wish to observe, and they serve with the realization that “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). We have heard that “one rotten apple will spoil the whole barrel,” but if we deal properly with the one that is rotten, we will not dispose of the whole barrel! Yes, we are saddened when even one of our preaching brethren is overcome by some evil, but more so, when he allows that failure, like Judas, to destroy his future prospects for serving God. He not only endangers his own soul, but may influence his family and others to follow his destructive ways.

It is my conviction that two classes of preachers should read these good articles. First, those who have made some of the mistakes addressed, and second those who want to avoid making those mistakes. I hope this brief overview will whet your appetite to carefully consider these important lessons and share them with others.