

Who Does He Think He Is?

Joe Slater

“The paradox of the pulpit is that its occupant is a sinner whose chief right to be there is his perpetual sense that he has no right to be there, and is there only by grace and always under the spotlight of divine judgment.”

Scottish preacher A. C. Craig spoke those words back in 1953 in one lecture of a series entitled “Preaching in a Scientific Age.” His lectures were printed in a book by the same title the next year.

While we could find much about which to disagree with this preacher from the Church of Scotland, the above-quoted statement is right on target. Christians are redeemed sinners, and that most assuredly includes the preacher. The great apostle Paul considered himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Any preacher who supposes that he is “better” than his audience, or that his own personal goodness somehow entitles him to speak the oracles of God, ought to sit down and be quiet!

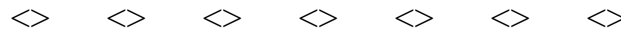
What right do I have to preach? That question nags at me. Just who do I think I am? Actually, I know all too well who and what I am – a flawed, broken creature who upholds a divine standard that I did not set, and that I fail to meet. As Craig said, I have a perpetual sense that I have no right to be doing what I’m doing.

By God’s grace, I have the opportunity to preach Christ. Since we have established that I do not merit this privilege in any way, and since it is, indeed, a privilege, the only alternative is that it is by grace (unmerited favor).

As usual, however, privilege comes with responsibility. Craig correctly observed that the preacher is “always under a spotlight of divine judgment.” Paul

told Timothy to take heed to himself and to his teaching, for in doing so he would save both himself and those who heard him (1 Timothy 4:16). A faithful preacher must preach only the truth and all of the truth. Paul emphasized that he had declared the “*whole counsel of God*,” and was therefore innocent of the blood of all men (Acts 20:26, 27).

The first of this month marked the completion of my seventh year working as a gospel preacher with the church here at Justin. I am keenly aware that I don’t deserve the privilege, and I am thankful both to God and to this congregation.



Charisma versus Character

Character isn’t attached to power over other people. While charisma’s primary tools are the trappings of likability, character is focused on the inside. It’s who you are when you’re all alone. After all, that’s when you need strong character most and charisma least, because charisma is worthless without an audience.

It seems like many are working hard on charisma and less on character these days. So here’s a gentle warning: Investing everything in charisma can mess you up . . . and those around you.

Iron doesn’t sharpen iron in the mind of the charismatic leader. Praise and adoration are rewarded with favor, but any disagreement is promptly shown the door. Perceived criticism, real or imagined, is an unforgivable sleight worthy of being cast into outer darkness.

On the other hand, people with character are well-liked, but make it clear that the priority is love of truth, even when it hurts (2 Thessalonians 2:10). They buy it up, happy to pay full price (Proverbs 23:23) – and never sell out for a pot of beans (Hebrews 12:16). Character rewards candid honesty and despises flattery.

We need more character and less charisma.

--Jared Jackson, via Fortify Your Faith (adapted)

A REMNANT

“Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had become as Sodom and had been made like unto Gomorrah” (Romans 9:27).

During the last four months, I have connected with over 6,000 Twitter users, people from all over the world. I blocked many caught up in Satanic worship and others who indulge in pornography and such sins. I saw the culture of those who live to promote ungodliness. I cried with a man in England who tweeted his dying wife's last breaths, for a young man in Ecuador whose girlfriend was killed by police, and for the man living in the Colorado mountains whose little kitty was eaten by a wild animal.

What caught my attention during my "tour" of the world is that the light of God shines strongly through the darkness. I met missionaries working in schools and orphanages in the poorest of countries. I found preachers teaching Muslims the Bible in the Middle East and Africa and saw Christians laboring against odds to spread the Word in Communist countries. A young woman in Los Angeles belted out the hymn "In Christ Alone." Her face expressed the joy she felt singing about her Lord. All over the world, bloggers, book authors, website builders, singers, counselors, churches, and preachers tell about our Lord and His love for mankind.

Yes, just as God had a remnant of Israelites who obeyed Him, He has a remnant in our world today. Their voices are heard by millions. They work tirelessly and sometimes give their all to save others physically and spiritually. They are shining lights in a world of darkness. And yes, except God had raised up all these Christians, our world would be as Sodom and Gomorrah.

God still calls each Christian to show His love to others. We don't have to go around the world. Maybe we can just step across the street. Won't you be a light shining in a world of darkness?

--Donna Wittlif (Denver, CO)