

Harsh And Graceless Preaching

by Steve Higginbotham

Several years ago, I read a book written by a brother who set out to describe the preaching that took place 60 to 70 years ago. Here is what he said:

“The sermons just seemed so harsh and graceless...If you were going to preach in the 1940’s and 50’s in the Churches of Christ, you had better be able to quote at least seventy-five verses per sermon or you were out on your ear in no time. Never mind that they didn’t fit the context of your message, that was irrelevant, you just had to be able to string them together and spit them out fast enough to let folks know that you were the right source for all of their Bible-thumping needs.”

Never mind the fact that the brother who wrote this wasn’t even alive during the time this “harsh,” “graceless,” “Bible-thumping” preaching was supposed to have taken place. Personally, I am weary of hearing such charges against preachers of the past. To me, such caricatures and accusations betray that the people making these accusations don’t really understand what grace is.

If one is traveling the broad road that leads to Hell, and I warn him, and attempt to turn him to the gospel of Christ, is that not grace? When one is lost in sin and another person attempts to show him the doctrinal or moral errors which are jeopardizing his salvation, is that not grace? Indeed, it is a strange view of grace that allows one to remain unchallenged in sin, all the while hearing pleasant sermons and amusing stories from the pulpit.

Are you aware that the Bible only records one instance of Jesus ever using the word “grace?” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Interesting, isn’t it? Jesus never mentioned the word “grace,” but he warned of Hell 11 times. Would anyone therefore dare suggest that Jesus was a “harsh and graceless” preacher? Friends, warning people of Hell and pointing them to Jesus is not harsh or graceless. What greater gift could one be given?

Friends, preaching the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and seasoning our speech with salt (Colossians 4:6) is neither harsh nor graceless, but is exactly what this world needs.