



The Soul-Winner's Secret

Chapter 17 – "So Spake"

"And it came to pass in Iconium that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and SO SPAKE that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed." (Acts 14:1)

Bless God for such preachers and such preaching! How did they do it? What was their secret? I think it is threefold.

1. Their Manner. They must have won the multitude by the sweetness and grace and persuasiveness and earnestness of their manner. They certainly did not offend and shock them by coarse, vulgar, uncouth speech, or by a weak and vacillating, light and foolish, or boisterous and domineering manner. They wanted to win men, and they suited their manner to their purpose.

Solomon said, "He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend."

This "grace of the lips" is not a thing to be despised. It is rather something to be thought about and prayed over and cultivated. It was said of Jesus, "They wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth," and a police captain said of Him. "Never man spake like this Man;" and doubtless this graciousness was not only in what He said, but also in the way He said it. His manner was authoritative, yet gentle; strong, yet tender; dignified, yet popular and familiar. You can say to a little child, "Come here, you little rascal." in such a sweet manner as to win its confidence and draw it to you; or you can say, "Come here, you darling child," in such a rough, coarse way as to fill it with fear and drive it from you. It is largely a matter of manner.

Garrick, the great actor, was asked why he could so mightily move men by fiction, while preachers,



speaking such awful and momentous truths, left them unmoved. He replied, "They speak truth as though it were fiction, while I speak fiction as though it were truth." It was a matter of manner. A woman so far away from Whitefield that she could not hear what he said, was weeping. A bystander asked her why she wept, since she knew not what he said, "Oh," said she, "can't you see the holy wag of his head?" His manner was matchless. Lawyers pleading before judges and juries, and political speakers seeking to win votes cultivate an ingratiating manner. Why, then, should not men who are seeking to save souls and win men to Jesus Christ seek from God the best manner in which to do this?

2. Their matter. I judge that not only was their manner agreeable and attractive, but their subject-matter was interesting, grave, and unspeakably important. They preached the Word; they reasoned out of the Scriptures; they declared that the prophecies were fulfilled, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, of whom Moses and the prophets wrote and spoke, had come, was crucified, was buried, but was risen again, and that through obedient faith in Him men might have their sins forgiven, their hearts purified and their whole being sanctified and filled with God. It was not stale platitudes they preached, or vain babblings about the Seventh Day, about baptisms and feet-washings and incense and vestments, or harsh criticisms of authorities and "powers that be," or divers and strange doctrines, but it was "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21.) This was the substance of their message.

(a) It was a joyful message. It was good news; it was a declaration that God was so interested in men – "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life; for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." The war-worn, sorrowful old world needs such a joyful message.

(b) It was an illuminating message. It showed them how to be saved from sin and made acceptable to God. It also threw a flood of light into the grave and beyond, and "brought life and immortality to light." Jesus was "the first fruits of them that slept." It robbed earth of its



loneliness, and the tomb of its terrors. It turned the world into a schoolroom and preparation place for the Father's house of many mansions, and made heaven real.

(c) It was a solemn and searching message. It called men to remember their sins and repent of them, forsake them, and surrender themselves no longer to the pleasures of ease, but to the service of God. They must take sides. If they would be saved, they must follow Christ crucified. "Every road leads two ways." If they would put away sin and follow Jesus, He would lead them to heaven; if they rejected Him they would surely go their own way to damnation, to hell.

3. Their spirit. The manner may be acceptable and the message true, but if the spirit of the speaker be not right there will hardly be a "great multitude" of believers. The cannon may be a masterpiece and the powder and shot perfect, but if there be no fire, the enemy need have no fear. The manner may be uncouth and the message fragmentary and faulty, but if the spirit be right, if it be humble, and on fire of love, believers will be won.

Cataline, a Roman citizen, conspired against the State, and Cicero, the matchless Roman orator, delivered a series of orations against him. The people were captivated by the eloquence of Cicero. They went from the Forum praising his oratory, lauding his rhetoric. extolling his gestures and his graceful management of the folds of his toga.

Philip, of Macedon, was planning to invade the States of Greece. Demosthenes, the Athenian orator, delivered a series of orations against him, and the Greeks went from his presence saying, "Let us go and fight Philip!"

Doubtless the manner and matter of the two orators were equally above criticism, but they were as far apart as the poles in spirit. One sent the people away talking glibly, prettily about himself; the other sent them away filled with his spirit, fired with a great impulse to die, if needs be, fighting the invader.

After all, I imagine it was this right spirit, this white heat of soul, this full-orbed heart-purpose



which was the principal factor in winning that multitude of believers in Iconium that day. These apostles were great believers themselves. They were full of glad, triumphant, hell-defying and defeating faith. They were not harassed by doubt and uncertainty. They did not preach guesses. They knew whom they believed (2 Tim. 1:12), and because they believed they spoke (2 Cor. 4:13), and "so spake" that the faith of a multitude of others was kindled from the fire of theirs.

This faith had also kindled in their hearts a great love.

They believed the love of God in giving His Son for them, and their hearts were in turn filled with love for Him. They believed the dying love of the Saviour, and their hearts were so constrained with love for Him that they were prepared to die for Him. (Acts 20:24; 21:13) They believed the love of God for all men, until they loved like Him, and felt themselves debtors to all men (Romans 1:14), and were ready to be offered as a sacrifice for the salvation of men. (Phil. 2:17)

Oh, it was a bright faith and a burning love that set on fire the spirits of these men! And I think this Christlike spirit molded their manner and made them natural and gentle and strong and true and intense with earnestness, with no simper or whine or affectation of false pathos; no clang of hardness; no sting of bitterness, and no chill of heartless indifference. What school of oratory can touch and train the manner of an actor so that he shall for an instant compare with the untrained, shrinking mother who is suddenly fired with a quenchless impulse to plead for the life of her child? The best teacher of style in public speech is a heart filled to bursting with love to Jesus, and love and hope and fear and faith for men. A love that makes a man feel that men must and shall be won from hell and turned to righteousness and heaven and God. will surely, in due time, make the manner effective.

And it will also shape and control, if it does not make the message. It is marvelous the message men get whose hearts are afire. Someone asked why Mr. Bramwell could say such wonderful things. The reply was, "He lives so near the heart of God and the Throne that he gets secret messages, and brings them down to us." It is pitiable, the flat, insipid, powerless, soulless messages men manufacture when their faith is feeble and their hearts are cold!



Can we not, then, sum up for ourselves the secret of these men in the words of Solomon, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life?"