

“Christian preaching should always offend the devil”

Published in *The Morning Sun* on January 22, 2011

Greetings in the Name of our Crucified and Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

A few months back, I heard the host of my favorite Christian radio program make an observation about preaching that I had never really considered before then, but have not stopped pondering since. The observation made by Rev. Todd Wilken, who hosts “Issues, Etc.” (www.issuesetc.org), was that much of what passes itself off as Christian preaching today is not the least bit offensive to the devil. He made this observation during his concluding remarks about the sermon of a popular preacher he was reviewing on the show. He asked listeners if there was anything about the sermon they had just heard preached that would offend the devil. There wasn’t. No call to repentance, no mention of the cross and the forgiveness, life, and salvation won by Jesus. In fact, Jesus was only mentioned a couple of times in passing during the thirty minute sermon, which was nothing more than a self-help, pep talk.

This observation is as profound as it is simple. Christian preaching should always offend the devil. If the devil is not the least bit offended by the sermon, the preacher has failed to do what he is called to do. But, this obviously begs the question: What is it that offends the devil?

Before we answer that question, let’s take a look at what doesn’t offend the devil. The devil is not the least bit offended by motivational messages, which focus on moving Christians to believe in themselves and to tap into the supposed champion-like power they have within. The devil is not the least bit offended when he hears Christian preachers exhort their hearers to follow this or that 7-step program, in order to deepen their relationship with God and increase their chances of receiving His blessings. The devil is not the least bit offended by “how to” sermons (or, sermon series), no matter how cleverly they’re advertised or how appealing they may sound to the masses. The devil could not care less if the preacher spends his time telling you how to be a better husband, wife, parent, child, or how to better manage your finances, or how to spice up your sex life (yeah, sadly, that happens), or how to find your purpose, so that you can “become a better you” and “live your best life now.”

Not only is the devil not offended by such preaching, but he thrives on it. His most earnest desire is for Christians to focus on themselves, for he knows that, if Christians are focused on themselves, they will not be focused on Christ. Thus, when the devil hears preaching exhorting Christians to work harder at being better at this, that, or the other thing in their lives, he can sit back and relax, for his job is being done for him. This is exactly what he wants. He wants Christians to believe in themselves and to turn their attention away from their Savior. He wants Christians to view Jesus as a mere example to follow, or as a life coach, someone who does nothing more than guide them toward earthly health, wealth, and prosperity, as if this is the goal of the Christian life. When preaching is directed toward that end, the devil will gladly sit in the front pew and listen with great delight.

What offends the devil is the truth being preached. He detests it when he hears the Law being preached in its full severity, reminding hearers that they are sinners who need to repent. He hates it when the Christian preacher refuses to pander to the “felt needs” of his hearers and will not stroke their egos, scratch their itching ears, and tell them what they want to hear. He abhors preaching that leaves Christians helpless and hopeless and leads them to cry out in desperation, “Lord, have mercy

on me, a poor, miserable sinner!” When the devil hears such preaching, he screams in despair and cowers in fear, for he knows what’s coming next, namely the pure, sweet message of the Holy Gospel.

There is nothing more offensive to the devil than Christian preaching which is Christ-centered and Cross-focused. He can’t stand it when sinners are directed to the cross, where Jesus shed His blood and died to pay the full price for all of their sins. He can’t stand it because it was at the cross where he was utterly defeated by Jesus, and because he knows that it was at the cross where Jesus won forgiveness, life, and salvation for the world, and because he further knows that it is through the preaching of the pure Gospel that repentant sinners receive that forgiveness, life, and salvation won by Jesus.

Oh yes, nothing offends the devil more than the preaching of the pure, sweet message of the Holy Gospel. But, the Gospel is robbed of its sweetness and rather meaningless if it is not first preceded by the preaching of the Law in all its severity, leading sinners to repent and turn to the Lord for mercy. Thus, Christian preaching which offends the devil is Law and Gospel preaching, which leads hearers away from themselves and toward their Savior, Jesus, who did everything necessary for their salvation, crying out from the cross, “It is finished!”

Self-help and how to messages have no place in the Christian Church. Those sorts of messages are the same kinds of messages one will hear in every other religion man has created in this sinful world, for every world religion, save Christianity, is a religion focused on works and man’s efforts to achieve his own salvation. That is why they do not offend the devil.

What does offend the devil is when preachers in the Christian Church follow after St. Paul, who said, “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2; see also 1 Cor. 1:18-25). And so, I concur wholeheartedly with Pastor Wilken: Christian preaching should always offend the devil, and preaching Christ and Him crucified to sinners in need of a Savior does the trick!

In Christ,

Rev. Thomas C. Messer, Pastor

Peace Lutheran Church ~ Alma, MI

www.peacealma.org ~ (989) 463-5754

You may contact Pastor Messer by calling the church or by email: pastor@peacealma.org