

Chapter 1

Maintaining a Proper Perspective

“Why trimmest thou thy way to seek
love?” – Jeremiah 2:33

MAINTAINING A PROPER PERSPECTIVE

In Jeremiah 2, Jeremiah preaches what would be his first message to the people of Judah. He begins in chapter 2:1-3 by picturing Israel and Judah in their younger days, as a people who loved the Lord and were anxious to please Him. From that point on, he begins to mention the sins of the people. It leads up to this question, found in verse 33. He asks it again in verse 36, "*Why gaddest thou about so much to change thy way?*"

Consider this question, "*Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?*" The word "*trimmest*" conveys the idea of taking away, such as trimming a bush. But it also conveys the idea of adding to, as in to decorate, to accessorize, to add something additional. We say, "... all the trimmings." It conveys the idea of both taking away and adding to.

As you read Jeremiah 2, it is very obvious it was a time of sin, wickedness, and rebellion against God. It was a time of defilement and shame, a very, very troubling and confusing time. God's people were on a path of certain destruction. As a people, they desired to be loved by the wicked. We see that in verse 33, "*Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?*" God's people were seeking the love and approval of the wicked and this is why they "trimmed" their way. They added to and took away from God's ways, because they were seeking approval and acceptance. They were seeking love.

In this series of messages upon "Being The Church That People Need", we will find that it is quite different from "being the church that people want". There is a big difference.

We want to base the thought for this message on Jeremiah 2:33. God's people sought love and approval of all the other people around them. This resulted in them adding to and taking away from God's ways, both of which are sin. We are not to add anything to God's word and we are not to take anything away from God's word.

First of all, we want to consider the circumstances in which the Lord's churches find themselves in the world

today, the world that we are called to serve God in. In 2nd Timothy 3:1, the Apostle Paul writes, "*This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come.*" Notice those first two words "*this know*". Paul tells Timothy, "You need to know". You need to know the time in which you live. You need to have some comprehension, some understanding of what is happening. We need to have a sense of awareness of what is happening. We need to get a grasp of the times in which we live.

Paul says, "*This know also ...*", or in addition to, which of course takes us back to the immediate context of verses 25 and 26. In verse 25, we read of "*those that oppose themselves.*" To oppose is to be against. They are against themselves. They are not willingly living in opposition to themselves, but simply by the way they live their lives, they live against themselves, against their own well being. In verse 26, he goes on to talk of those that are taken captive. In a time when people are against themselves, they are their own worst enemy, if you will, and are in the very chains of the devil, the church needs to be what people need, not what people want. Why? Because those who oppose themselves certainly do not know what they need. Furthermore, what they think they need, is in opposition to their own good, is against their own good. They oppose themselves. Paul goes on to describe these times as perilous, difficult, trying, and hard times.

I believe the last days began with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are in the last days, they are progressing, and have been since that time. We are definitely in the last days of the last days. The BIBLE plainly teaches that men will wax worse and worse. Things are not going to get better. We are living in very, very difficult times, and they are going to get more difficult. We are living in very trying, threatening, very dangerous and hazardous times.

The word perilous is the same word translated "exceeding fierce," speaking of the demon possessed man of Gadara. That means in the last days, "exceeding fierce"

times shall come and they are demonic in their origin. In other words, very hostile, very aggressive, very unrestrained times will come. That is what Paul talks about in Thessalonians. The restrainer, which is the Holy Spirit, being removed. The Holy spirit, as a restraining agent, is gradually being removed today and that is why men wax worse and worse. Not that they are more depraved than they ever were before. Total depravity is total depravity. However, they are more brazen and open in their sin, and less and less restrained by the Spirit of God. These are the days in which we live. In such times the church needs to be what people need, not what they want.

In Jude and 2nd Peter, the BIBLE talks about people being deceived. People who are deceived do not know what they need. Lost man and the backslider don't know today what they need in church. Oh, they have some ideas, but their ideas are totally wrong. Their ideas of what they need is not what is going to help them, nor what is going to fix their lives. It may make them feel better about themselves, but it's not what they need.

Consider the influence that surrounds churches today. Consider the influence that every one of us deals with on a daily basis. We are surrounded by satanic influence everywhere. No matter where you go it's there. There is a constant onslaught by Satan to confuse everyone, even God's people. You have the influence of the world, which according to Ephesians 2, is in line with the influence of Satan. The world and the influence of the world, of course, is at enmity with God. The world today hates God and is offended by the things of God. In such times, we need to be the church that people need, not what they want. In fact we should not even concern ourselves with those that are at enmity with God, hate God, are offended by God, or what they want in the house of God. That's very dangerous. To even concern yourself with what God haters want in a church is a very, very dangerous thing. We need to be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

There are those who are under the influence of the world. In order to give them what they want, in order to make them comfortable, you must bring into the church the influence of the world. When you do that, you cease to be the church that they need. You now have become the church that they want. They are two entirely different things.

There is also the influence of our culture. Our culture wants nothing to do with the God of the BIBLE, absolutely nothing. The United States is not a Christian nation. We began that way, but we are not a Christian nation by any means. We are not even close. We have a culture that is thoroughly humanistic, filled with evolutionary thinking, individualism, and immorality. Our culture is a cesspool of ungodliness, and wants nothing to do with absolutes. Our culture is one that does not tolerate biblical convictions. Our culture will tolerate just about anything but the truth and biblical convictions. The influence of an ungodly, vile, abominable, world and culture is everywhere around us. We're surrounded by it. In such times, we must be the church that they need, not the church that they want.

If you are going to give those that are under the influence of an ungodly culture what they want, you must bring into the church the influence of a godless culture. You have given them what they want, but you've ceased to be what they need.

When I use the word "churches", I'm referring to just religious houses and not the Lord's churches. Most "churches" today are not what people need. They are not even close to what people need. They are far more in line with what people want than with what people need.

In our day, Satan has not decreased his hatred for God, for God's people, or for God's word one iota. He is no less of an enemy. He has not toned down at all his purpose, which is a purpose of destruction. He is just as destructive as he has always been. Actually, I believe he has increased his efforts to get an advantage over the Lord's churches and over the Lord's people. He certainly has not thrown aside any of

his devices, lost any of his wilds, nor lessened his attacks. Be sure of this, the world and the enemies of God's will, will not decrease in their enmity toward God or things of God. It will only intensify as we progress, as we get further along in the last days. That ought to make the church more aware than they have ever been and be more on guard than ever before. In such times, the church needs to be what people need, not what they want.

The world has not taken down any of its barriers to the truth. What the world wants to do is bring those barriers into the church. I have talked to numerous individuals and they say, "Oh yeah, I want to be a member of Home Baptist Church." However, they are unwilling to follow the church covenant. They are in disagreement with the covenant and everything Home Baptist Church stands for. But they know this is where God wants them. They can go to almost any other church in this county and they will let them be a member and live any way they please. But why here? Because the devil wants to bring the barriers into the building, into the assembly.

The world is not becoming more tolerant of biblical beliefs. It's not becoming more accepting of the things of God. Watch the news. Listen to the hatred. We are the enemy. We are the problem. They make this very, very plain. The world is not pulling back its opposition. This is a time when they have adopted the devil's programs. Many so called churches have adopted the devil's programs and agenda. These people are becoming more and more bold, more and more determined that you and I accept them, that you and I embrace and accept them and their lifestyle. They are not going to be tolerant of us, but they want us to be tolerant of their sin.

These are times when those who have a hatred and an opposition to everything that Jesus Christ represents, are relentless and determined. They are not ashamed of their sin. In fact, they have become more and more brazen in their sin all the time, daring the church to do anything about it, daring

anyone to say anything about it. In such times, we need to be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

We live in a time when good is evil and evil is good, in their minds. Not that long ago, even lost people had some morality. No longer. Now, those who profess to be God's people, sometimes have less than the world. It is a time when those who take a stand along biblical lines, are going to be ridiculed, mocked, and hated. We need to know the times in which we live. We do not expect to be loved, accepted, and embraced by the God haters and the enemies of truth. We expect to be ridiculed! We expect to be mocked! *We need to know the times in which we live!*

When the enemies, the haters, the despisers of God are on a rampage, they are on a mission of destruction. Let me remind you again, they are bold, they are resolute, they are determined. To give such a people what they want, is sure destruction. You would have to be a fool to give these people what they want. It will destroy you and the church. It doesn't matter how long a church has been in existence, or how much truth they have been taught, either. If you give into the world's ways, and begin to embrace the world and the ungodly, you will be ruined. You will cease to become the church that they need and you will become the church that they want. There is a danger.

In Jeremiah 2:33, God's people began to "take away" and began "add to", in order to be loved, because they sought love. Any time you take away from God's word, you will replace it with something. It is never an improvement. It is always going backwards. I do not care if you double your church attendance, it is not progress. You have gone backwards.

We have to stay focused. There is a great danger of losing focus and perspective. In Jeremiah's day, the nation was guilty of losing their focus and their perspective. They began to seek love and acceptance of the wicked. They became occupied with being loved and accepted. This

preoccupation with being popular, led to them taking away from and adding to the ways of God.

Many individuals and churches, even the Lord's churches, are doing and have done the very thing that the nation of Israel was guilty of in Jeremiah's day. They wanted to be loved, accepted, and approved. If that is your perspective, "We just want to be loved. We just want the world to accept us and approve of us", remember who you are dealing with! Remember what you are dealing with! You are not dealing with your friends. You are dealing with the enemies of God, the enemies of truth.

This desire to be loved and accepted is a part of our nature. We all want to be loved. We would rather be loved than hated. We would rather be accepted than unaccepted. It is our nature, but it should never be our focus. It should never ever be our perspective, especially when we are dealing with the world. For this to become our focus and perspective, is contrary to the very word of God. It's what Jesus reiterated to that first church in John 15:18, *"If the world hate you you know that it hated me before it hated you."* There is a link, an association between Christ and his church. "If the world hates you, it's because they hate me". Now, those that hate Christ, is that's who's approval you're looking for? *"If you were of the world the world would love it's own."* You want to be loved by the world? You must become part of the world. "Oh, the church needs to be loved by the world so they will come and they'll hear." The only way that a church will be loved by the world is to become of the world. There is no other way. That is what Jesus is saying, *"... but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ..."* We ought to be more concerned if the world feels comfortable around us. If the world feels comfortable in our church services, that ought to concern us more than if they hate us and if they're offended by what we do. The church will never be what people need when the focus is upon being loved and accepted. Because when the focus is about being

loved and accepted you begin to take away that which offends them. And pretty soon you're the church they want, not the church that they need.

We live in a time of small churches, as far as the Lord's churches are concerned. Because of that, God's people get fearful. They begin to see their numbers dwindle and they begin to panic. They begin to get into the thought process, "You know if this continues, 10 years from now there won't be anyone left. We won't be here anymore." They begin to get in that thought process. "Why are our numbers dwindling?" They begin to ask themselves that question. "Why is our attendance going down? Are we doing something wrong? Perhaps we need to be less offensive. Perhaps we need to lighten up on some things. Perhaps we need to make it a little easier." That's what they were doing in Jeremiah's day, they wanted to be loved and accepted. Do not allow fear to grip your thinking.

Churches, for the most part, go in cycles. Churches that have been around for a while go in cycles. At times the church may be very elderly and you think, "Oh, in another 5 years, they're all going to be dead!" Then in 5 years the church is filled with young people. The Lord has his ways of taking care of his church. You and I shouldn't be that concerned about it.

We shouldn't be overly concerned with our attendance. "Oh no, our attendance is dwindling! You know I believe it's because the pastor is just not preaching the right messages. He needs to preach different messages. The lost are being offended." Do you want them to feel comfortable? Do we want the ungodly to feel comfortable? I'm not in any way implying that is our focus, but there is always the danger of that becoming the focus. In Jeremiah's day, when they sought to be loved and accepted, they added to and they took away from the things of God. It's no different today.

Today as a result of "Christianity" focusing upon being loved and accepted, focused upon being popular, they have become less offensive. You can preach all day long to

the world as long as you don't say anything, and they will love you. There are masters at it. People who have mastered the art of talking without saying a thing. The world says, "Oh, they're deep! I got a lot out of that!" The church is happy because they went away happy. If they go away happy, guess what?... they'll be back. As long as they keep coming back our numbers stay up and everything looks fine. But it's not fine. There are terrible, terrible problems.

So, the church becomes less offensive. They become more accepting, more embracing, and accommodating to the ungodly. Now they dance around their sin, and they never mention sin by particular names. They may mention it in general terms, but you better not get particular because when you start getting particular, lost people might get offended. If they get offended they won't come back. If they don't come back, how are they going to be saved? You leave the saving to God. The result of being focused on being loved and accepted is disaster.

When you want to be loved and accepted as a church, there is an attempt to make the sinful feel at ease. You want them to be comfortable and happy during the message. You want them to be happy after the message. In order to do this, first of all, you must not say anything, and secondly you must entertain them. It is the result of seeking to be loved and accepted that has brought in the contemporary music programs, which has brought about a complete alteration of what worship should be. All because we want everyone to be comfortable. A church that says, "We have something for everybody." Well, we do, but it is not what they want. Most churches that say, "We have something for everyone", mean, "We have a program, we have an activity. We have something to make everyone happy."

We don't have something that will make everyone happy. There are people that are going to go away angry. There are people that are going to come one time and never ever come back again. There are people that are going to come one time and they are going to bad mouth Home

Baptist Church. But we can never ever get so focused, “Oh we just want them to love us.” In order for that to happen, you have to compromise. You have to become them. You have to become them in order for them to be comfortable.

As a result of focusing upon being loved and accepted there's an attempt to stay away from anything that would threaten the lifestyle of the ungodly. In other words, everything in the word of God threatens the lifestyle of the ungodly so what churches have gone to is, “In order to be loved and accepted, we will stay away from anything that is threatening. We don't want to be confrontational.” Read the gospels. Jesus was very confrontational. The fact is truth is confrontational. It confronts error. “And we must stay away from anything that would cause division.” You know, some division is good. Don't always look at somebody leaving as a bad thing. Sometimes it's the best thing that can happen. God uses His word to cause some people to leave. That's what some people have lost sight of. They have this idea that God uses His word to get everybody to come in. God uses the preaching of His word to get some folks to leave for the health and the benefit of the body, and for His church. We do not want to see lost sinners and the back-sliden leave and never come back, but the emphasis should never be on keeping them. The emphasis should never be to prevent them from leaving. Because if it is, you have to become them.

All across the land, God's people are trying to win the approval of the world. Instead of being the light that reveals sin, we become just dark enough that people will not feel uncomfortable in their sin. It can not be the goal nor the concern to keep the unsaved and the back-sliden happy. That's not our goal. We're not to set out to make them unhappy, but it's not our goal to keep them happy. It does not concern me when there are lost people in a church, “... are they going to be happy with the message?” That doesn't concern me and shouldn't concern anyone. Your concern ought to be that the Lord would save their soul. When that

happens, God's going to upset them. Never let it become our focus that we have got to keep them coming, we have got to do something to get them in. When you do that, you begin to secularize the things of God and that is sin, to secularize the spiritual.

Churches that begin to have a diversity of programs, so everyone can be entertained and keep everybody happy, has led to the mega church madness. This is what has led to user friendly worship. This is what's leading to creating a new religious form where the thinking is, "We have got to keep the masses happy." It has led to a remaking of biblical traditions that are more acceptable to the modern person. "We want to minister to those who are turned off by the biblical message." What a sad commentary when a church advertises, "Come see us. We especially invite those who don't like church to come be with us." What are you saying? "We have ceased to be, we don't even pretend to be a church, so if you're tired of the old biblical way come and be with us." It's all out of the desire to be loved and accepted. They will tell you, "We are ministering to them. We are ministering to their needs." You are not capable of ministering to their needs because you have become them. You can not minister to their needs because you are now what they want, not what they need.

The whole mind set, the false premise is, "If they like us they'll be more accepting of the message of the word of God." Don't you see if that becomes your focus, "... we don't want them to get mad, we don't want them to leave...", the message of God is so altered that it's no longer what they need. What's being preached is no longer what they need. The message of God has become a message of self esteem, it's become a god-is-love theology, it has become political correctness, it has become easy believe-ism. The church is no longer what people need, it's what they want. We don't want to give the world what they want. That's not our purpose. If we are going to continue to be the church that

people need, it must never become our purpose, to give people what they want.

Beware of wanting to be loved and accepted by those who are turned off by the message of the Bible. You meet someone and they say, "Oh I went to church and the man preached from the Bible... it just turned me off." Then you say, "Oh, you ought to come to our church." What you need to tell them is, "You're going to be turned off there, too." What a shame to tell somebody to come to your church when they're turned off by biblical preaching. What a sad, sad commentary.

When you desire to be loved and accepted you begin to make deals to keep people. "Oh brother, we don't want you to leave. What can we do?" That's wrong! "Oh, we'll do anything to keep you here." How sad! You don't make deals to keep people from leaving. You don't make deals to get them in. As we've said many times, they're joining us, we're not joining them. There are things that are not open for debate. If you want to ask questions for the purpose of learning, fine. These things are not open for debate. We're not making any deals, we're not cutting any deals. "Well, this is a family of 10 people! We've got to have them!" No you don't. Don't ever think you have to have someone. If you begin that line of thinking, you're going to compromise. You can't think that way. That applies to keeping a preacher, it doesn't matter, there's no exceptions.

To be the church that people need, we need to realize this truth, "It is NOT our responsibility to make God acceptable. It IS our responsibility, our duty to declare Him." That's our duty, to declare God. When you honestly declare God, people are going to get offended, upset, and angry. People are going to leave and they're not going to come back. It's not our responsibility to make God acceptable, to make the word of God acceptable or appealing. It's our duty to declare the word of God, and that's going to offend some folks. That's what Jesus said. It's not our duty to make the ways of God appealing and

attractive. It's our duty to declare them. That's our responsibility.

Our responsibility as a church is to declare the truth. It's not our responsibility to make the church more appealing, more acceptable to the world. It's our responsibility to do the business of God. When the focus shifts to we want to be loved, accepted, popular; we want the unsaved and ungodly, the wicked and the vile, and our church services to feel warm and fuzzy and comfortable; when that becomes our focus, we cease to be the church they need, and we now have become the church they want.

Some people will say, "Well, Brother Dan, don't you understand? In order to be the church they need you got to get them to come here." That's God's business. We need to keep our business straight and keep God's business straight and that will keep us straight. Many have gone astray simply because they can not separate those issues. To be the church that people need, we can not be focused upon being loved and accepted.

Sometimes lost people or the ungodly attend services and they don't seem to be happy or mad. I'm kind of glad when they get offended because it tells me that they heard something. (We leave the rest of it with God.) There's a lot of people that don't hear. There's lost people that come up to me, I've told them they're on their way to hell and they say, "Oh I really enjoyed that." They didn't hear a word of it, because there's no way they would have enjoyed it. They would have been offended. The truth of the matter is, when we get focused upon love and we get focused upon being accepted, we've really lost focus of what it's all about. We've lost our focus on who it's about. I believe it's very, very important that we always be the church that people need, not the church that they want.

I have noticed through the years, over and over and over, people who will storm out, they will be as angry as can be. But, when they have a problem, who do they call? Because they know, there's a part of them that knows, "That's

what I need, it's not what I want, but it's what I need.” We need to be about God's business, doing everything for God's glory. These things need to be our priority, that we would never get sidetracked, thinking that we need to be loved and accepted. The best way to be loved and accepted is for people to be saved and they fall in love with you. People get right with God and they just fall in love with the church, they fall in love with everything the church stands for. That's the way to be loved and accepted. Not to become like them. It happens over and over again, it's happening in the Lord's churches today.

There are a lot of things that are stayed away from because of fear of offending. Right now, in most of the Lord's churches today there's just about every sin you can imagine. *In the church!* If you go and get concerned about who you're going to offend, you're not going to preach anything, because everything you preach is going to offend somebody. Just leave it with the Lord. Don't get overly concerned when people get upset. Rejoice that they heard something that made them angry and pray that God would use it.

Don't panic if the church begins to age and there's no young people, “Oh, what are we going to do?” Don't worry about it, it's God's business. God will take care of it. You know, people today get so concerned about young people leaving. I'm not criticizing concern, but I guarantee you, more older people have left Home Baptist Church than younger people. People aren't upset about that. Adults leave all the time. It happens all the time. “Oh, what are we going to do to get the aging population into our church?” You don't hear anybody say that! “What are we going to do to get the 60 and over crowd in?”, or the 50 and over or the 40 and over. “We want youth!” That God's business. We can't get sidetracked on those issues. Because if we do, we're going astray. It's going to be a path of ruin.