

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Sermon: ***Do Not Be Your Own Worst Enemy***

Years ago there was a new business located in the city where I lived. It was kind of a precursor of the Price Club or the Sam's Club, but in those days those names were not even known. It was unusual that they sent out ads and said you can come and join our club. If you will pay \$49.00 a year, then you will be able to have all these remarkable savings. Since I had never heard of that at that time, I went by, and I recognized it was in a poor part of town. It was in a very cheap building. When I went in, there were not many things on the shelves. When you asked about it, they said well, you can either pay for nice buildings and lots of merchandise and high overhead, or we can do it this way and you can just save bundles of money. So I thought about it for a while. But the key to me was that there was an ad in the paper that came out and said if you will come for this trial period and join, we will give you a diamond. So I said, cheapskate that I am, you know I could take that and put it on a little chain and give it to my wife, and that will be nice. So I went in and paid my \$49.00. They smiled and gave me a little velvet bag. As I walked out of the store, I thought probably I had made a mistake. I probably should have secured Brinks Armored Service to get me back to my car, but I realized probably that was not necessary so I went somewhere that I would not be subject to a jewelry heist. I opened it. Down at the bottom was this strange little thing. It was brown and it had jagged edges. It really looked like a kidney stone. So I took it to a friend of mine who was a jeweler. I told him the story and said I want you to look at this and give me a valuation on it. I opened it and put it on the

counter. Have you ever seen anybody try to laugh from their ankles up? So I asked him, "Tell me, How much is this worth?" That same thing---from the ankles up. He said absolutely nothing. He said it is a raw diamond, but if you cut it, it is so small there would be nothing left. I asked how much it would cost me for you to fix it up and make it look good. He said there is not enough money around. to make that available. Well, in about thirty days I received several things. I received my cancelled check for \$49.00. I received a letter from the Better Business Bureau saying there is a fraud in town. I received a notice that my company had gone out of business, and I was left learning a good lesson. That is, they do not give you diamonds to buy pots and pans.

You are aware that we live in a world of fraud. People delight in deceiving you. This past week I wrote a letter of recommendation for a member of our congregation. They said you must be very careful how you do it. You put the letter in, and then across the back of the envelope you must sign your name so that your name goes across on both sides. I said why is that true? They said because many people will steam open the letter, put another letter in it, and seal it back. So you have to be sure that you write it a certain way.

All of us know the kind of a world where we live in deceit, where people are trying to deceive you. The passage of scripture I am getting ready to read says that deceit comes from many times an unlikely sources. The unlikely source is us. What we do is that many times we deceive ourselves. At times our own worst enemy is us. We have the unique capacity to look at something and see beyond it and see the possibilities of what might be born. But we also have the tragic illness to look at the obvious and to twist it and to create a world of illusion. So in the Bible there are all of these passages that talk about do not deceive yourself. Let me read some of them for you today. This one in First Corinthians 3:18:

*Do not deceive yourself. If any of you think he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he could become wise. The wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.*

This passage is a warning to us that you and I live in a kind of a culture that is a cosmic shell

game. It will takes things that are valuable and put a price tag on it and say it is cheap, and take things that are cheap and say it is very important. So this passage of scripture is saying watch out for the kind of world you live in or you will be deceived to thinking some things are important when they really are not. But what it also gives you a warning about, is this. To think that with your own mind with unaided reasoning that you can figure out life by yourself. Deception number one: I can figure out life. All of us know that in areas of our life, we do not have expertise. That is the reason we have to go to someone else. When I have a medical problem and they want to draw blood, I want to go see somebody who has a medical degree. If I had any money to put in the stock market, I would want to check with somebody who would know what they are doing. When the car is broken, I want to take it to a mechanic. When I have bought a house at times I have thought I was all knowing, all wise, and I have tried to fix things in my house. My wife and I have a joke that happened one day. She told me we were having a plumbing problem. I volunteered. I said I can fix that. So what was an inconvenience, suddenly became a crisis. I called the plumber. He came by early the next morning while I was still there. He looked at it, and said somebody has been working on this. I said, yea, you never know who you will call and what kind of help you are going to get. He said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a preacher." He said, "Could I make an agreement with you? I won't preach if you won't plumb." I have learned that in areas of life I really don't know how to do things. I have to go to somebody to try to find out how to do it. But isn't it amazing that the most important thing, the most critical thing, the most eternal thing, how I'm going to live life, I come to it and I say I don't need any expert help. I don't need any voice from above. I don't need any book of guidance. I can do it myself. Here I am with all of the issues of life, and I feel like I have the ability to be able to do it.

All of us know that sometimes people who are very smart, very smart even in their own area, make critical mistakes of judgment. Let me read you a few of them. "I think in the world market there is

probably room for about five computers. Thomas J. Watson, IBM Chairman, 1943." "With over 50 foreign cars already on sale here, the Japanese automobile industry isn't likely to carve out a big slice of the U. S. market for itself. Business Week, 1958" "TV won't be able to hold any market it captures after the first six months. People will get soon tired of staring at a plywood box every night. Daryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox, 1946." "1930 will be a splendid employment year. U. S. Department of Labor, 1929." The one I love--"I don't need no bodyguards". James Hoffa, President of the Teamsters Union, 1975. "My imagination refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocating its crew and floundering at sea. H. T. Wells." "Airplanes are interesting toys but have absolutely no military value. Francis Marshall Fox, 1911."

Do you understand? Sometimes even smart people make critical mistakes. How do you know when you come to make the big decisions of life that you know how to make the right ones? Are you going to go by your experience? Are you going to go by what your friends say? Well, then, who are your friends? Do you have the education? Do you have the background? Do you have the training? How are you going to come to say this is right and this is wrong? What are you going to use for a judgment? Some people say it is like peas, porridge, hot. Some like it cold, some like it hot. Whatever you want to do is all right. How do you know that? The scripture says that what all of us need is to come to recognize the truth ultimately rests with God. Unless I listen to Him and unless I trust in Him and unless I get expert advice from Him, I am going to flounder around and make terrible mistakes.

Listen to two passages of scripture from the Proverbs: *There is a way that seems right to man but the end thereof is the way of death.*

Sincerity has nothing to do with it. Education has nothing to do it. Background has nothing to do with it. The Bible says you can

think you are doing something that is right, but you may make a terrible mistake. Proverbs 28:16: *He who listens only to himself, listens to a fool.* Big deceit of life, I can figure it out for myself. Let me ask you to turn over to the Book of Galatians, Chapter 6, to learn another deceit that we can do to ourselves. Chapter 6:3: *If anybody thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

This passage of scripture is about somebody who has made a moral mistake. What you are doing is you are reaching down to help them to try to get up. But instead of the spirit of compassion and caring being in your life, they begin to arrive at spirit of pride. What you say is, wasn't that a stupid thing to do. Why did somebody do something like that? I would never do anything like that. Deceit number two---I am above everybody else. I begin to think that other people can make mistakes, and other people can make failures, but I certainly would not do that. What begins to happen is I begin to live without a sense of dependence upon God. Without any sense of dependence upon Him, I begin to rush ahead and do all kinds of things in my own strength I never thought I would do. The Bible says that anybody who thinks he is wise is setting himself up for a fall. Why? Because I am not trusting in anybody else but me. What happens when I begin to look down on people, I can't look up to God to find the help and the strength that I need.

One time in my life I happened to be an officer in a religious organization. There was a pastor in our group who was having a great deal of trouble. So they called me and asked me if I would go and talk to him. The reason there was a problem was the man's son had been accused by a girl in the church of improper advances. The pastor had actually taken to the pulpit and tried to clear his son. "My son would never do anything like this. We are a fine Christian family. We read the Bible every night. We pray at night. We have raised our son. Now you may have a problem, but we don't have a problem at our house." My unfortunate task was to take the letters that the

boy had written to the girl, and show them to the dad. They weren't things that you would want your kids to read. So I went in and sat down with a private audience with the pastor. I said I understand there is trouble in the church, and that you have publicly accused this girl of spreading malicious things about your son, and that anybody who would spread malicious things ought not to be a member of your congregation. Before you go to the pulpit next Sunday, I would like for you to read this letter. Then the air started going out of the balloon. Finally he turned to me, and said I have made a tragic mistake. The next Sunday a very bright, able, capable man resigned his pulpit; took his family and moved away. The question was why? Where did he make the mistake.? I and my family could never do something like that. The Bible says you are heading for a fall whenever you think other people may do it, not me. There is a little phrase that many of you use in your daily life. There but by the grace of God go I. Whenever I begin to exalt myself and look down on others, what is happening is I am setting myself up for a fall. And I am deceiving myself. I am thinking I am somebody I'm really not.

Look down at verse 7: *Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

All of you went to school. You learned in your science class that you live in a world of law. God has set certain principles in the world that always operate. Every square inch of your body is 14.7 square inches of pressure. Some of us have more square inches than others, but we still have 14.7 square inches on us. You go up and say I am going to get on top of the steeple, and I am going to fly. You are going to fall. There is a law of gravity. What many people are not aware of is that there are laws in the spiritual life, just as unforgiving, just as true for everybody. Everybody is subject to the same ones. And one of them is this law. *Whatever you sow, that you are going to reap.* It is called the law of time. You remember at the first of the Bible it says this, and this was planted and it reproduced what--after its kind. What that simply means is if you put a tomato seed in the ground, you will get a tomato and not an okra. That is reproducing after its kind. When you

put goodness in your life, you are going to reap goodness. You break the laws of God, you are going to suffer consequences. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a Christian or not a Christian, whether you are a preacher or not a preacher, if you break the laws of God, God's law says you will suffer consequences. Deceit says I can break the laws of God, and I can get by with it. And many of us have a gambler's spirit. I can do whatever I want to do, and the laws of God do not affect me. Someone made the statement most of us sow wild oats all during the week and come to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure. Hear it again! Do not be deceived. The laws of God are in force, and it is the law of kind. When you do it, you always are going to ..... But listen to what makes it difficult. A tomato seed is this big. If you put it in the ground, you don't expect to get a tomato that big. You put the seed in the ground, and the seed has in it the power of life. A stalk is going to come. You may get 20 tomatoes off of that stalk. What is the law? What you put in, the consequences are always more. How many people have come to me and said I never knew it was going to lead to this. If I had known this was going to happen, I never would have done that. Of course, you wouldn't have. But you see, the law is there. It operates that way. Whenever I begin to think I can do what I will and it is not going to affect me, all I am doing is deceiving myself. There is a strange thing about it. The more I do it, the more I think I can get by with it. Sin to the spirit is like a terrible disease to the body. One of the dear friends I have had in my life was a fellow pastor friend. His name was Lee Prince. Lee was a few years younger than I am, much, much brighter, just was a wonderful man of God. He used to get in the pulpit, start speaking, and then all of a sudden he would start all over again. He couldn't figure out what was wrong with him. He was bright enough. He kept on and he kept on, until finally they diagnosed him with what is called Lou Gehrig's disease. If you are not familiar with that disease, ALS, what happens is, it affects somehow your muscular system and the longer you have it, the less they work. His wife said that at times he still wanted to take care of himself. Here this

bright, brilliant fellow would have to sit down. He couldn't even pick up food to get to his mouth. So all he could do was just put his mouth to the same level as the table, and he would push it to himself. The longer he had it, the less he could do, the less he could respond until finally he died. Let me warn you what sin does in your life. Sin works exactly the same way. When you do something wrong when you are young, you respond. Your conscience says no. And you say no. Then after a while, you say maybe. Then after a while you say well, why not. Then after a while, you say yes! What happens is the more and more you do it, it blinds you and weakens you, until after a while deception sets in. I can do anything I want, and I can get by with it.

I talked to a family one day about their son. They used the phrase that is the title for the sermon. He is his own worse enemy. Do you know who may be your own worse enemy? You! You may be creating a world of illusion. So the Bible keeps coming back. Don't deceive yourself. Don't deceive yourself. Don't deceive yourself! The greatest things that can happen in your life are bent knees. You are going to see more from your knees than from anywhere else. Tears in your eyes. You will see more from tear stained eyes when you confess what is wrong with you than anywhere else. And a broken heart. If you tried to live and cried just saying I, I, I, you are headed for difficulty. Jesus said if you want to know how to live, I am the Way. I am the Truth. I am the Light. If you want to know how to get through life, He is the way. If you want to know the right decision to make, He is the truth. If you want to know how to live, He is the light. And if you have never come to the point where you have surrendered yourself to Him, then you are living in tragic deception. Let me ask you. Have you ever come to the point in your life where you have given yourself to Him? Say, Lord, I can't live like I want to and like I need to. I want to give my life to You. I wonder ,if you have never done that if you wouldn't say,

you know, boy, I need that more than I need my next breath. Some of you are here today who are Christians who very much need a church family and church home. You know Him, but you need to develop and grow and to become more like Him. You need to come today to move your life and membership and become a more active part of your faith.