

Sometimes It Is Not Enough!

One of the earliest jobs my dad had was teaching school – he began while he was still in his teens, with a one room school in upstate Mississippi. Some of his students in the higher grades were as old and as big as he was, and more than one time he maintained discipline with the threat of a literal fist fight! He would tell me of a mother who brought her son to school and explained that he was very sensitive. She said, “whenever there is trouble, and discipline is called for, just hit the boy next to mine, and Junior will get the message. There will be no need to actually punish him.” (To this day, I am not sure whether this actually happened, or was one of his “made up” experiences). Whatever, I’m here to tell you it will not always work.

Early in my preaching “career”, not much older than my dad was as a teacher, I was in a work in central Illinois, and a Methodist lady started attending. For some reason she became attached to me, and continually praised my efforts, coming up to me after every lesson to tell me how much she appreciated my stand for truth. Believing (and I still do) that my work included identifying and opposing every stripe of religious error, I started including in my material lessons on sprinkling, and the error of salvation by faith only, as well as one or two other fallacies the church she was with held to – and this continued for a number of months. No matter, she still held me high, and expressed her respect for me as a teacher who “taught the bible”.

After a while, it dawned on me that there was a disconnect between what “her church” believed, and the truths I advanced relative to those things. I had taken these issues in isolation, without being specific about who taught them. Eventually, I preached a lesson on Methodism, pointing out that the Methodist church taught sprinkling, faith only, instrumental music, and so on. That was the last time she commended my teaching, and soon after she quit attending... As long as I was “hitting the one next to her” (teaching without making a specific connection), she failed to get the message! When she realized these things had personal implications, her prejudices kicked in.

The lesson I learned? Teaching “general truth” falls short of the demands of gospel teaching! Biblically, teachers in the first century made it clear as to the application: “THOU ART THE MAN”....God doesn’t “blind side” folks, and neither should we. Becoming a disciple requires hard choices, and it does not help to withhold the implication of such alternatives. “Warning the wicked from HIS wicked way” (Ezek 3:18-19) is an uphill fight if he doesn’t even know he is among the wicked!

- by Aubrey Belue

Need For Specific Preaching

Several years ago I was delivering a lesson on "Distinctive Preaching." One young preacher in the audience took issue with some points that I made and said, "I just preach principles, I don't make application. I let each person do that for himself." I replied, "Don't you think David was glad that Nathan didn't do that?" He wanted to know what I meant. I reminded him of Nathan coming to King David after David had taken another man's wife and later had that man put in a position to be killed. Nathan came to David and spoke of a rich man who had many flocks and herds and a poor man that had just one little ewe lamb that was like a child to him (2 Samuel 12). When the rich man had the opportunity to entertain a stranger he did not take from his many flocks and herds but took the poor man's one little ewe lamb. David understood the principle. In fact the Bible says, "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity'" (2 Samuel 12:5,6). It was not until Nathan said, "Thou art the man" that David made the application to himself and acknowledged his sin (see Psalm 51).

Yes, sometimes we must be very specific in our preaching if we expect people to understand and make application. Many will say "Amen" when we teach that we must respect the authority of God's word in all things, but will get upset when we start examining various practices or doctrines in the light of God's word. It is great, to them, to have you say that we need to reject the doctrines of men, but when you identify some of these (instrumental music in worship, church support of

human institutions, church sponsored recreation and entertainment, etc.) they get angry as David did. I know from personal experience that just because preaching makes one angry doesn't mean that the preaching did no good. It may cause one to study and examine his life in light of the truth and make the necessary changes in his life.

- by James Hahn

Three Kinds of Christians

There are three kinds of Christians in any local congregation. Which kind are you?

1) There are those Christians you can always count on. When there is work to be done, when a volunteer is needed, when a need must be met, you can depend on these folks to step forward. They carry their own weight, and they help others carry theirs, too (Gal. 6:2,5). There is never a doubt about their commitment or dedication. Their obvious zeal serves as a positive source of encouragement to others. You just never are left to wonder where they stand - because they demonstrate their faith in every way. These Christians serve as the "core" of any faithful congregation. Without them, important work would never get done - crucial matters would be left unattended - the church simply would not do well. Thank God for all such brethren. May their tribe increase!

2) There are some other Christians in the church that are absolutely "out of it." They have little if any connection to the real work of the local congregation. They never are around if there is work to be done, and they simply DO NOT volunteer to help with the on-going efforts of the group. It is even impossible to count on these folks to attend the services regularly. Almost anything can serve as an excuse for them to miss the assemblies. And, observing their spotty attendance, others are left to wonder if they are really doing any profitable work in service to the Lord.

3) There is yet another group that is in evidence in the local church. These are the ones who are "riding the fence." They want to give the impression that they are faithful and involved, but in reality their lives are full of compromise. They vocally claim allegiance to Christ, but they can't be counted on to consistently put the kingdom first.

Our Lord described these three kinds of Christians as "hot," "cold," and "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:15,16). Which term describes YOU?

- by Greg Gwin