

Attitudes toward Preachers and Preaching

One of the ways to measure the spiritual health of a congregation is to consider its attitude toward preaching and toward those who do the preaching. Throughout the Bible, God has chosen to spread His message through human messengers, imperfect men who carry a perfect gospel. Because of that, our attitude toward preaching is never a small matter. It reflects how we view the Word of God itself.

Preachers should not be treated like performers. In many places, preaching has been turned into entertainment. Some evaluate sermons the same way they might evaluate music or a speech: Was it funny? Was it exciting? Did he tell enough stories? Preaching is not meant to impress us. It is meant to instruct, rebuke, encourage, and lead us closer to God. Paul told Timothy, *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."* (2 Timothy 4:2). A preacher is not an entertainer or motivational speaker. He is a messenger of God's Word. When we approach preaching with a consumer mindset, we often miss the point. The question is not, "Did I enjoy it?" but "Did I learn God's will, and will I obey it?"

Preachers should be working to effectively present their lessons and should never take their work lightly. Preachers carry a serious responsibility, but it is unwise for a congregation to expect perfection from them. They are human. They get tired. They face temptations. They need encouragement, prayer, and patience. That does not mean a preacher is above correction, but it does mean we should be careful not to become hypercritical, cynical, or impossible to please. A congregation can either strengthen a preacher's hands or weaken them through constant fault-finding.

Preaching requires good listeners. Even the best sermons cannot help a person who refuses to listen with an honest heart. Some sit with their arms crossed, already determined to disagree. Others listen only if the message is aimed at someone else. The Bereans were called "noble" because *"they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."* (Acts 17:11). A good attitude toward preaching would be for the listener to think about how the lesson can be personally applied. Jesus said, *"Therefore take heed how you hear...."* (Luke 8:18).

In a time when many are abandoning sound doctrine, faithful preaching is needed now as much as it ever was. Paul warned, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."* (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A church must decide: Do we want the truth, even when it challenges us? When a congregation loves truth, it will support a preacher who preaches it, whether convenient or not. The preacher's job is to preach the Word. The hearer's job is to first make sure it's true, and if so, to receive it, apply it, and live it. When both sides do their part, the church grows stronger, souls are saved, and God is glorified.

- by Josh McCord

Use It or Lose It

This expression is often heard in regard to physical exercise, when the idea is being promoted that muscles have to be used in order to insure greater use of them in the future. To fail to do so, will tend to slowly lead to muscular atrophy, a loss of what strength you presently have. But the same principle applies to things spiritual as well.

In Mark 4:24-25, Jesus says, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him." When it comes to hearing God's word, understanding it and then applying it, God warns in so many words, "use it or lose it."

We all have some ability to get to know God and His will. We all have opportunities to fulfil the desires of our heart religiously, but if we neglect to use them, we may end up losing even that which we have. Conversely, the more we put into seeking after God, the more we will get out of it and the more we will be equipped for future success.

Ecclesiastes 12 warns mankind to remember the Creator in the days of youth, before the evil days come and there is no interest. We go through changes in our lives, and some not for the better. One such change may be a degenerating interest in spiritual concerns. Don't let this happen to you. Use it, so you don't lose it.

- by *Whit Sasser*

Blessed More Than We Realize

The recent ice storm caught many folks off guard. Power outages, slick roads, and cold homes quickly reminded us how much we depend on everyday comforts. Things we usually never think about—electricity, heat, running water—suddenly mattered a great deal. When those things were taken away, even briefly, we were reminded of how blessed we truly are.

Most of us live with a level of comfort that people in earlier times never knew. We enjoy warm homes in winter, cool air in summer, full grocery stores, and reliable transportation. Even King Solomon, whose wealth was famous (1 Kings 10:4–7), never experienced the conveniences we take for granted. Jesus said Solomon's glory was unmatched in his day (Matthew 6:29), yet Solomon never flipped a light switch or turned on a heater. What we consider "normal" would have looked like unbelievable luxury to him.

As wonderful as our physical blessings are, they are not the greatest blessings we have. In Christ, we possess far more than comfort and convenience. We have forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), peace with God (Romans 5:1), hope beyond this life (1 Peter 1:3–4), and a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). Storms may come and comforts may fail, but these blessings remain.

Perhaps the ice storm served as a gentle reminder. We are richly blessed in this life—but even more so in Christ. May we learn to be thankful for both, and especially for the spiritual riches that will never fade (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

- by *Greg Gwin*