

Bible Reading

Christians, do you read the Bible in your families every day? Do you read it in your closet every day? And do you read it not to quiet your conscience as a work of penance; but do you read it as a pleasure anxiously to be sought after? If you do, I need not tell you what utility, pleasure, and happiness is in the blessed employment. But if you do not, you may rest assured there is something greatly wrong, which, if it is not abandoned, subdued, or vanquished soon, will cause you sorrows, if not agonies, when you will be less able to conflict with them than at present. Resolve this moment, I pray you, that you will begin today to read the Bible, to enjoy God and Christ and the hope of immortality. "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee, bind them about thy neck, write them upon the table of thine heart; so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man." Then will you say with Solomon, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding: for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor: her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." "Begin today: 'tis madness to defer." The religious world -- I mean the great majority of all professors -- are Bible neglecters. Their ignorance, prejudice, and error show it. I beseech you, daily, habitually, constantly, prayerfully read the Bible in its proper connections, and you will grow in grace as you grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. The Lord will bless you, as he has said, in this deed. Read James 1:22-25, and may you prove it true!

***- by Alexander Campbell
The Millennial Harbinger, January, 1839***

Abandon Youth Ministries

The Christian Chronicle carried an interview with LeGard Smith, who was at the time "Scholar in Residence for Christian Studies" at David Lipscomb University in Nashville. One item caught my attention. Smith was asked what he would say if he had the undivided attention of every member of churches of Christ for 10 minutes. Included in his answer: ". . . I would call on the church to abandon youth ministries, which have toppled the spiritual hierarchy. Throughout Scripture, spiritual leadership is not only male, but it's elder. It's the wisdom of the years that leads and nurtures younger generations."

Abandon youth ministries. This is not the cry of some old fogey ultra-conservative who resists change at every turn. It is the counsel of one who is seeing among his peers the ripe fruit of an ill-advised tree.

Youth ministries typically feature two things: abundant recreational activities and shallow, entertaining instruction. What happens when teens who are accustomed to such things become adults? Will they immediately consider themselves too old for church-sponsored recreation, or suddenly insist on more sober worship and meatier preaching? Of course not. As a result, today's "adult church" has in many cases become just a slightly toned-down version of yesterday's "youth church."

The Bible, of course, knows nothing of youth ministries, youth church, or church-sponsored recreation for any age. And it emphatically warns against ear-tickling preaching (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

This warning is timely. In recent years, increasing numbers of congregations which have stood opposed to institutionalism and church-sponsored recreation (things readily accepted by Smith's associates) are beginning to dabble in youth ministries. We don't call them that, of course, but the trend is cause for concern.

Special meetings for young people call for certain speakers, those whose presentations are more entertaining. The truth is slightly repackaged - less Bible reading and exposition, more stories and humor, and lessons that are mostly application with content limited to "relevant" (daily living) themes. Parents provide ample food and entertainment.

Do not misunderstand. No one opposes occasional sermons targeted at a particular segment of the audience, nor do we underestimate the value of young Christians getting together. However, when meetings for young people consistently take on a more entertaining air, when the add-on recreation becomes expected, when we advertise it along with the worship (even though it

is not paid for from the church's treasury), and when brethren begin to say that we may lose our young people without such events, we have gone farther than we think down the wrong path.

- by **Frank Himmel**

They're "Too Conservative"

Someone who was about to move into a new community happened to mention that they were giving consideration to attending a particular congregation in that area. Certain brethren warned, "Don't go there, they're too conservative!" What is meant by such an accusation?

Is it so that the brethren at that congregation have begun to teach things that are not found in the Bible? Are they binding certain traditions that are not in the Word of God? Are they insisting that others follow their own personal opinions in areas where they cannot find specific scriptural authority? If so, those brethren aren't really "conservative" at all! They are not "abiding in the doctrine of Christ" (2 Jn. 9). In a sense, they are actually "liberal" in their approach because they have ceased to produce "book, chapter, and verse" for their practices. Let their errors be fully exposed, and let brethren be rightfully warned about attending such a congregation.

In reality, it is far more likely that the church that was described as "too conservative" is actually a congregation that stresses strict adherence to Biblical authority. They probably insist that folks "do Bible things in Bible ways." There is most likely a strong emphasis on personal purity and morality. Constant reference is made to the Bible and its teachings, and members are encouraged to "come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). And while the positive, "feel good" aspects of Christianity are no doubt taught, the so-called "negative" themes - the warnings of the Scripture - are also included. False doctrines and false teachers are sometimes - by necessity - called by name just as in the first century (1 Tim. 1:18-20). Such an approach is not popular in the world today. Therefore some dismiss a congregation like this with the charge that they are "too conservative." What we are saying is that this accusation most often comes from weak, compromising Christians who themselves refuse to take a stand for the truth.

It is really impossible to be "too conservative." The moment a church violates scriptural authority - by either failing to uphold and practice the truth, or by binding what God has not bound - they have become "liberal" in God's eyes. Instead of throwing out prejudicial 'labels', give the evidence that a congregation is violating scriptural authority (Col. 3:17) and be ready to prove your allegations. Otherwise, we suggest you keep your opinions to yourself! Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**