

Positive Preaching

I like positive preaching. I like to hear it. I like to do it. It is like watching the sunshine glisten on the dewy leaves of the apple tree by my window, fresh from a springtime shower. I appreciate the knowledge that the sunshine and the rain will make the tree grow, bloom and bring the delicious ripened fruit. I know that it takes positive preaching to make the Christian grow in grace and knowledge, blossom in faith and fervor, and bear the delightful fruit of a mature working Christian.

Only one year, however, made me see that it takes more than sunshine and rain to produce a bountiful harvest of golden apples from the tree. I saw that the tree needed annual pruning. It needed spraying or some other natural preventive of disease and contamination of the fruit. Otherwise, a pretty little moth would find a lodging place for its egg in the bloom and every apple would be wormy and ruined.

It took no longer for me to learn that positive preaching is not enough to produce the good fruits of Christians. It takes pruning, cutting away the superfluous growth, the weak limbs, the diseased branches, and the crossed branches which would abrade other good ones. This is after the order of the Lord's parable of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-8).

Some negative preaching and work has to be done to clear the church of such branches; including "strife, jealousy, wrath, factions, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults" (2 Corinthians 12:20).

- by Robert Welch

"Fellowship Halls"

Many churches today build what they call "fellowship halls" or "fellowship buildings" (and now "family life centers") to accommodate their social and recreational activities, and even hire "fellowship ministers" to plan and supervise such activities. But such activities fall outside of the realm of scripturally authorized congregational work. The Greeks and the Romans were very much into feasting, games, contests, exercise, and entertainment, and they built baths, pools, gymnasiums, theaters, and stadiums to accommodate such; but churches of the Lord in that same time were into assembling together for worship, teaching, exhortation, edification, and they provided places to accommodate such. They were primarily interested in glorifying God and saving lost souls. They did not resort to gimmicks and carnal means to attract or keep the people. The gospel of Christ and the blessings that come through it were all they had and all they needed to offer the world.

Churches in the New Testament did not employ such things, but how they grew! Theirs was a spiritual mission with eternity in view. All they had with which to attract the lost was the gospel of Christ, themselves as living examples of that gospel, a Savior who was willing and able to save, fellowship with God and the children of God, and the hope of eternal life in heaven. They did not resort to material gimmicks to attract and to hold the lost, nor should we. They knew the difference between their fellowship in Christ and what passes for "fellowship" in religion today. Let us emulate them.

- by Bill Crews

Influencing Our Children

Influence and education start sooner than most parents imagine. It begins long before children are responsible for the things they do.

The most powerful school in all the world is the home and the influence of godly parents. The most permanent impressions are learned from mothers and fathers. Parents, it is very difficult to convince your child:

- 1) That the church is the most important thing in all the world if you often miss services.
- 2) That the church is the greatest institution in the world if you permit them to neglect services to go elsewhere.
- 3) That the church is to be held in higher esteem than anything if you insist that they get their school lessons, but permit them to miss Bible study.

4) That they ought to respect the church if you continually criticize the leadership, the preacher and other members.

- by **Everett Hardin**

Don't Forget!

Advanced age activates avowed antagonism against avid and aggressive activity. About the only thing folks my age exercise is caution. But, don't fall for Satan's line that old folks are more forgetful than young folks. Sure, old folks forget trivial things like dates, names, where they put their glasses, etc. But young folks forget vital things, like death, that old age is coming, and most important of all ... that they really don't "own" anything; they are merely stewards of things granted them by God. When you lose your false teeth, or specks, you'll finally stumble on to them somewhere in life's clutter. But, when you forget that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (1 Cor. 10:26) and go strutting around like you really "owned" earthly possessions ... only death, literal or spiritual, will open your eyes to the fact that you don't.

- by **Dwayne Laws**

"You're NOT Going To Change Me!"

In a recent visit with a denominational preacher, it was noted that we have some real and serious doctrinal differences. "Would you be willing to discuss these in a friendly way?" I asked. He responded: "I'm not going to try to convert you, and you DEFINITELY aren't going to change me!" While the attitude he expressed is very common these days, we think it is wrong on several levels.

1) This attitude certainly conveys the idea: "I'm right, and couldn't possibly be wrong." No one can afford to think that way. Consider Apollos (Acts 18). He was a well educated man from a respected center of Biblical studies; he was an eloquent speaker; and he was highly committed to spreading his message (vs. 24-25). But when he arrived in Ephesus, two 'ordinary Christians' (Aquila and Priscilla) recognized his faulty understanding and reached out to him with help (vs. 26). To his great credit, he accepted their instruction, changed, and went on to be a faithful and effective preacher of the Word (1 Cor. 3:4ff). That would have never happened if he had proudly said: "You DEFINITELY aren't going to change me!" Let us all be open to the reality that we just might be wrong, and if so we WANT to be instructed "in the way of God more perfectly."

2) This preacher's response also suggests that he isn't really interested in ME! We differ. He acknowledges this. Yet he has no interest in changing my understanding. How can this be? If these differences are significant enough to provoke his 'you won't change me' reply, then they are surely important enough that he ought to want to change me. Yet, he says no. Out of love for my soul he should want to teach me (2 Tim. 2:25), but he won't.

3) His reaction to the offer to study our differences also shows that he is content to remain in a divided state. In so doing, he is directly counteracting the desire and prayer of Jesus that we be united (John 17:20,21)

His response was a common one, but it exposes some seriously wrong attitudes. Think!

- by **Greg Gwin**