

## ***Dealing with Boring Sermons***

How can we keep from being bored during sermons? Some will say the answer is in the preacher, but regardless of the speaker's shortcomings, others will know that much of the answer is in us as listeners. It takes preparation and participation.

How do we prepare for sermons? The Jews had a Day of Preparation that preceded the Sabbath in which they set things in order for the proper observance of that day. We, too, can set things in order to get ready for properly observing a time of worship. This worship includes the sermon or lesson, a time of study and preaching of the gospel.

We prepare mentally and spiritually by considering how important worship is both to God and to us as His children. We prepare physically by, regardless of how much we have to do on Saturdays, never being so busy that we are worn out before Sunday comes. We make sure we are rested. If there are Bible class lessons to be prepared, we make sure they are done. In our prayers, whether our own or as a family, we ask the Lord to help us look ahead in anticipation of worship together as a congregation. Having done these things, then, approaching the sermon is simply approaching another part of the worship. We are prepared to hear the word of God declared.

How do we participate in a sermon? We listen carefully and we think about what is being said. We think about whether the passages used are being applied correctly. We think about how it applies to us, individually, as families, and as a congregation. Many bring pen and paper, making notes to keep better focused. Some use wide-margin Bibles so they can make notes alongside passages. This is not a time for being distracted by audience noise or movement, of thoughts about lunch, or matters at home or work. It is a time for God's word, a lamp unto our feet and a guide unto our path.

A simple comparison may help us: how do we properly take the Lord's Supper? Most of us say that we put away the cares of everyday life and focus on the Lord and His sacrifice for our sins. This same sort of focus is the answer to dealing with sermons. The idea of falling asleep during the Lord's Supper is horrible to us. Imagine your feelings at hearing someone snoring as the bread and cup are passed...

We get out of sermons what we put into them. The more we invest of ourselves the greater blessings we will receive, not from "the sermon," that's the wrong way to think of it, but of the study of God's word. "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, just as it is with you" (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

***- by Robert Hines***

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## ***The Biblical Approach versus The Denominational Approach***

It is all a matter of direction and perspective. The Biblical approach is to look at the Bible, and to accept it as the complete and sole authority. The denominational approach is to look at the church, the denomination, and to accept it and its teachings as a satisfactory standard of faith and practice.

A man will settle in his mind what he will believe and practice according to the standard he accepts. The atheist, by the fact he does not believe in God, has no standard outside of himself that he holds as authoritative, so he reasons within himself and goes by his own sense of what is reasonable and good.

The pagan looks to his idol and what he considers to be the sacred words of his god, and that is what he goes by.

The denominationalist looks to his church and accepts its interpretations as binding and final. He views the Bible as a "church book", as though it draws its strength from the church. The conclusions of the church, to him, are the highest law, and the church may therefore teach and practice whatever it deems to be good, even if it is not in the Scriptures. The Bible is the tool of the church! It is something the church uses; it is not something by which the church is ruled! This is why no effort is even made to cite Biblical precedent and authority for all that is preached and practiced.

The Christian looks to Scripture, specifically to the New Testament, for he holds it to be the gospel, the word and will of Christ. No church has a right to extract what it pleases from Scripture,

but is obligated itself to be in complete conformity and obedience to the sacred "thus saith the Lord".

Jesus, not the church, is Lord. Men make up the church, but that gives them no license to make law, nor exempts them from simple obedience to the teachings of our Lord.

- by *Jere E. Frost*

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## ***Religious Pragmatism***

Occasionally, especially when discussing politics, we'll hear someone described as a "pragmatist." What this means is that the fella's main operating rule is "do whatever it takes." His standard for judging whether a thing is good or not is: "Does it work?" All that matters to him is getting the desired result - it doesn't matter how he gets it. If he gets re-elected, if his campaign contributions keep coming in, then everything is "good." Never mind that promises have been broken, questionable tactics employed, even laws violated. The pragmatist isn't concerned with such details and technicalities.

There is clearly a growing trend toward pragmatism in religion. It is that philosophy which says "the end justifies the means." All around us we see the signs of it. Many denominations have been following this approach for decades. Now, even among churches of Christ we see it. Some of our brethren have become completely consumed in the quest for "results."

We all want to see the church grow. We long to see lost souls converted. How can we achieve these goals? The pragmatist says "do whatever it takes." If this means changing the Scripturally authorized work and worship of the church, he is willing to do so. Go ahead, add instrumental music - people like it, and even expect it, so let's have it. Let women take a leading role in preaching and conducting the services -- after all, this is the trend in the world, and we've got to adjust to it if we want to "keep up." And, we need to add recreation and entertainment to draw the young people; social services to entice people with special "needs," etc., etc.

There's no stopping place for the religious pragmatist. As he continues his work we will see the church go farther and farther away from the truth taught in God's word. Instead of pragmatism, we need to demand a "thus saith the Lord" for all we do and teach (Col. 3:17). Think!

- by *Greg Gwin*