

Distinctive Preaching

For some time I, and others, have expressed concern about the kind of preaching that is being done in many places today. In expressing this concern I have frequently said that much of the preaching that is being done today could be done in any denominational church without any change and it would be accepted.

Some have interpreted this concern as saying that our "difference from denominations" is the measuring stick for our preaching. No one that I know who has expressed this concern over the lack of distinctive preaching has suggested that this is the measuring stick for our preaching nor have they lamented over the lack of "church of Christ" doctrine in the preaching being done. In fact, the men I have heard expressing concern over the kind of preaching being done have been the ones who have spoken out against the denominational concept of the church and are the ones who emphasize the distinctive message of God's word. They are the ones insisting that the word of God is the only standard of authority and that we must respect that authority. When this kind of preaching is done on a regular basis you will be teaching men and women what they must do to be saved; that Christ is THE way and that He is the Saviour of THE church (Acts 2:38;

John 14:6; Eph. 5:25). We are not talking about lessons from time to time that may deal with some Bible character or lessons from his life. We are talking about a compromising spirit on the part of far too many who will not preach what the word of God teaches on the plan of salvation, the church, the work of the church, the worship of the church, the organization of the church or the truth on many other moral and doctrinal issues.

I am ready to affirm that when we preach the gospel in its purity and completeness that teaching will not be accepted by denominationalists, not because we have sought to "offend the denominations", but because it is the truth. Brethren, don't be deceived into thinking that the willingness of denominations to accept certain lessons you may preach is an indication of their "closeness to the truth." That acceptance is based on the fact that the particular lesson may be something with which they agree. For example, I could go to a Baptist Church and preach a lesson showing from the scriptures that baptism is an immersion and every word I say be true and be accepted by them but that would not mean they were "close to the truth" on what the Bible teaches concerning baptism. They still deny the truth on baptism and its purpose.

We need to realize that when we seem to be closer to the denominations than we used to be it is not due to the denominations coming closer to the truth; it is due to our leaving the truth. It is a shame when men are criticized and misrepresented when they make an appeal to get back to preaching that will convict men and women of their sins and teach them what they must do to be saved. This kind of preaching will not be accepted by the denominations but it will be pleasing to God and that's what is of real importance.

- by James Hahn

Being "On Time" For Worship

Have you ever thought about how scrupulous people can be in the matter of punctuality in their being on time for their various commitments? If a concert is set to begin at 8:00 P.M., - they arrive in plenty of time to take their seats before that very first number begins. If they are to be dinner guests at a 6:00 P.M. affair, it is almost certain that they will leave home in ample time to make it. They would not want to insult the hostess. If employed by a company which requires them to report for work at 7:30 A.M. they get up early and make certain they "punch in" on time. These same people make arrangements to meet specific appointments with their physicians and dentists. Also if they have an appointment to discuss a business deal at a specific hour, they will be there unless it is necessary to cancel it because something very urgent comes up unexpectedly. Parties, picnics, dinners, concerts, sports, business obligations - all such affairs are attended to by most of us with all punctuality.

Have you ever noticed that Christians sometimes are not as punctual when it comes to the business of Jesus Christ? It may well be that in no other area is there such a high incidence of tardiness. That which is of the greatest importance is often handled with the least diligent effort. The common practice of all congregations is to have fixed hours of Bible study and worship on the Lord's Day and during the week. These hours of services are well-understood by all. Is it too

much to expect the disciples of the Lord to do everything they can to be present before time for the services to begin? Every thinking person is well aware of the fact that unexpected things may delay anyone occasionally. The baby may suddenly become ill or need attention. A flat tire or other car trouble, a long distance telephone call, overflowing of the plumbing, coming upon an accident or traffic jam - just a host of "happen-stances" may cause people to be unavoidably detained, causing them to be late for the services. But really - is this usually the case? And especially if people find themselves being habitually late?

Surely this whole problem could be solved by each of us if we took to heart some plain Bible teaching about the attitudes we should have toward Christ and His work. Think about such passages as these: "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." "Be ye steadfast . . . always abounding in the work of the Lord." "Set your affections on things above . . ." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God. . ." How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" "Lovest thou me more than these?"

It is possible for one to break the bad habit of chronic tardiness at the services of the Lord if we will just make these sentiments a vital part of our lives. (Think about it.)

- by **Barney Keith**

'It Doesn't Say Not To'

Imagine this: you walk into a fast food restaurant and order a hamburger, fries, and a coke - the all-American meal! But then, you notice that it seems to take an unusually long time to get your food. Finally, the gal at the counter brings up your order - piles of food on three separate trays! "What's all of this?" you ask. "Well", answers the waitress, "it's one of every item on our menu. Your bill comes to \$85.68". You protest: "I didn't tell you to bring me all of that food!" "But", she replies, "you didn't tell me not to".

Could this happen? Of course not! We all know that when you specify what you want, you automatically eliminate other options. We operate with this understanding every day. In fact, this logic is so standard, that we don't even think about it. When you order something from a catalog, or call in a pizza, or write a grocery list, you naturally assume that it is understood that you want only what is specified, and nothing else.

What's the point of all this? Simply that in religious matters we ought to employ the same logic. God has perfectly revealed through His word what He wants us to do in His service. We should naturally assume that since He has told us what He wants, other things ought to be left out.

For instance: What about music in worship? The New Testament specifies singing - there is no mention of instrumental music in New Testament worship. Since God has told us to sing, and nothing else, we ought to do just that. Someone answers, "But it doesn't say not to play instruments". The Scriptures don't have to say not to - that's the whole point!

- by **Greg Gwin**