



The Reflector

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Sound Doctrine Produces Sound Churches Demanding Sound Doctrine

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I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 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 4:1-4.

A local church is going to be about as strong and sound as the preaching it receives and is willing to endure and support. Paul’s solemn charge to Timothy had a sense of urgency about it. Preach the word now, while brethren will endure it, or face a time when they will not.

For several years this writer has been paying particular attention as seasoned brethren (preachers and otherwise) express their concerns about the churches of today. The one dominant concern seems to be the caliber of preaching coming from our pulpits of late. As one old soldier of the cross expressed it to me, “I am getting tired of going to gospel meetings and hearing ‘fluff.’” He went on to explain what he meant by “fluff.” Preaching that contained very little real Bible teaching.

Brethren, strong congregations cannot be built and

maintained on “fluff.” Did you ever buy cotton candy? Then you know what “fluff” is. I remember, as a youngster, that I would spend my dime on a huge stick of it at the county fair. It was spun and displayed so as to make me think that I was getting a lot more for my money than I was. I soon learned that I had bought mostly fluff — very little candy inflated with a lot of air.

The sad thing about it all is that many churches had rather have “fluff” than real spiritual food. As long as churches demand it, there will be those who are willing to be paid to spin it out for them.

Sermons and classes with real doctrinal content are held in disfavor by many of today’s churches. The demand is for more “relevant”(?) matters. Themes more suited for psychologists and sociologists are replacing basic Bible topics. Topics that address so-called “real problems” and “real life concerns” of “today’s Christian” are replacing those that deal with what the Book says about man’s basic spiritual problem, sin; and his real basic needs — conviction of sin and the salvation of his soul. Lectures aimed more at enhancing man’s present happiness and welfare than ensuring his eternal well-being are by far the most widely received. Preachers that entertain and make brethren feel good about themselves, rather than producing godly sorrow leading to repentance or any real depth of scriptural knowledge, are given the most favored status among brethren.

Sermons that really teach the Bible are considered, “uninteresting”, “too-structured” and even “crude” by some. All too often preachers who resort to such are asked to find some place else to do their preaching. We have observed a rash of this lately.

Subjects more suitable for a civic club seminar than for a gospel meeting are commonly announced. Sunday after Sunday, if what I hear is accurate, talks that would be welcomed in any denominational church in town are passed off as gospel sermons. Unfortunately, as the title of the old country song put it, “*What Lola Wants Lola Gets?*”

So, all too often, preachers and elders bow to the pressure of those who want this “fluff.” We know a good preacher, who is capable of making Bible studies interesting, who began a study of Isaiah (with its emphasis on the Messianic prophecies) for a college-age class. There was so much opposition to it by some members of the class that the elders saw fit to set up an alternate class — so that those who wanted to could study something more “interesting” and “relevant.” As my daddy used to say, “Now isn’t that a pretty come off?”

A congregation constantly fed on “fluff” will not develop an appetite for sound doctrine. Any who may have had an appetite will soon lose it. Without a desire for sound doctrine churches are vulnerable to all kinds of fables.

Neither motivational hype nor emotional manipulation is gospel preaching. Such may produce increased activity of a sort. It may even build and inspire audiences after a fashion. It may enhance the speaker’s standing with brethren as a dynamic speaker. But, it will not produce a well-grounded faith based upon a “thus saith the Lord.”

Brethren, our preaching must follow the pattern that Paul outlined to Timothy. In form, it must have a well-rounded combination of convincing (reproving — KJV), rebuking and exhorting (or encouraging). In substance, it must have teaching (doctrine) at the base. It is no accident that Paul, in the preceding chapter, shows the Scriptures to be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

Book, chapter, and verse preaching/teaching that quotes or reads scriptures and then makes clear applications of the reading seldom sweeps folks along on

clouds of ecstasy. Nor does it flow quite as smoothly as Dale Carnegie trained orations. Nor is it likely to make folks jump up and down with uncontrollable joy nor roll in the aisles with laughter. It will likely cause them to mostly sit and ponder on the validity of the message — comparing it with the Scriptures before them. Once convicted of the validity of the message, they will then be motivated to act with both an intelligent and emotional response to the great message preached. They are then moved by the power of the gospel preached more than the charismatic personal power of the preacher/teacher or dynamic qualities of his delivery.

We need preachers who will preach it just like Paul and other inspired men wrote it. Preachers who will preach the word in season and out, without regard to whether churches will endure and support it.

We need churches who not only *endure* sound doctrine, but *demand* it of those they support in local work, in gospel meetings and throughout the world. Unless we have this we will continue seeing churches slide toward religious error and philosophical foolishness and away from the sound doctrine based on “what saith the Scriptures.” ■

Moralizing over the Gospel?

Doy Moyer

If not careful, one can easily lose the gospel message through mere moralizing, perhaps thinking that preaching the gospel is equivalent to pushing moral and political issues. Moralizing is the expression of moral judgments or opinions about right or wrong. “Mere” moralizing means that one stops at the expression of these judgments. Many see this as self-righteous and hypocritical, focusing on one specific issue perhaps while ignoring other equally important matters. The goal of moralizing is typically to get people to change their moral stance on something, or at least to feel ashamed if they don’t.

This can be a problem on at least two counts:

First, this approach doesn’t save souls. Second, just getting people to change moral views is not the essence of the gospel.

Of course Christians ought to be teaching and standing for biblical morality, and nothing said here should be understood otherwise. At the same time, while Christians understand that immorality without

repentance will condemn (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor. 6:9-10), and that God does call us to holiness (1 Pet. 1:13-16), we also need to understand that the need for the gospel is due to the fact that we are all moral failures. This is not to excuse sin, but we know that all of us are guilty (Rom. 3:23). We all stand condemned and in need of salvation, and just changing our moral views or becoming “better” people is not what fills that need. Further, never do we reach a point where we no longer need the gospel message, for none today can claim perfection. We can only claim forgiveness. While grace does not excuse sin (Rom. 6:1-2), the need for grace will never go away (1 John 2:1-2). We will never be able to rely on ourselves, as that will surely lead to further failure. We’ve all tried it and failed miserably.

One reason that mere moralizing doesn’t work is that it gets the cart before the horse and focuses the attention upon imperfect Christians rather than God. We must stand for moral values, but even if we get people to change their moral views, and if we get more moral laws on the books, these actions by themselves haven’t saved a single soul. Moralizing alone will only condemn because it shows a violated standard without a remedy for redemption. The gospel is more than a change in moral standards.

This also leads people to think that a moral failure (sin) for a Christian necessarily means that the Christian is a hypocrite. Why? Because the message doesn’t stress grace and forgiveness. It just stresses the importance of moral action. When morality is the main issue, and one fails, then the whole system is seen as a failure and the world is quick to point that out. A Christian certainly can be hypocritical, but confession, repentance, and seeking forgiveness are not acts of hypocrisy. Christians who do this are doing exactly what Scripture tells them to do (1 John 1:7-10).

The gospel is needed precisely because we are failures. Since “gospel” is good news, there are two vital components to the gospel that need to be understood and proclaimed:

1. All are guilty of sin (Rom. 3:23), and we cannot save ourselves just by changing moral habits. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2:8-9). To moralize the gospel is to turn it into a works-based system, and this is not the gospel.

2. Christ, by His grace, died to offer forgiveness, and any message that doesn’t include this is not the gospel. “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us” (Eph. 1:7-8a).

Only when we seek and teach God’s grace and forgiveness through the cross of Christ will we then be spreading the gospel. Once people accept what Christ has done for them, morals begin to change. People will repent, not because morals are forced on them politically, but because they will desire the grace and forgiveness only God can provide, and repentance is the only viable response (Acts 2:38; 3:19; cf. Titus 2:11-14).

If our message to the world is filled with the hope of forgiveness, the riches of God’s grace and mercy, and how repentance fits into this, then we will not be presenting an “us vs. them” political type of message; rather, we will present an “all of us are in the same boat and need saving” type of message. What distinguishes the Christian from the world at the most basic level is that the Christian has come to God for that forgiveness. Yes, there are greater implications for how Christians should be living (e.g., not conformed to this world, Rom. 12:1-2), but the focal point of the gospel message must always be this:

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared...” (1 Cor. 15:3ff).

If this real gospel is not accepted, then no amount of moralizing will save souls. The failure of “moralizing over the gospel” is that the message is not the gospel at all. It’s a cheap substitute based on a misunderstanding that we can fix our own problems. Let’s make sure our message properly reflects what God came to do in Christ. ■

Genesis 1: Literal Days or Long Ages?

Greg Gwin

The ‘Day/Age’ Theory argues that each of the days in Genesis 1 were actually long ages of time. This, of course, is an attempt to harmonize Biblical teaching of a young earth with the false claims of some scientists who claim our earth and universe are billions of years old. Here are some simple affirmative arguments to

prove that the days of creation in Genesis 1 were literal 24 hour days rather than long ages of time:

1) God defined His own terms in Genesis 1:5. “And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” A period of light followed by a period of darkness constituted a day. Unless someone wants to argue that it stayed light for long periods and then stayed dark for long periods (which, of course, poses huge difficulties), we will have to stand upon this clear statement and conclude that the days really were literal 24 hour days. Furthermore, Genesis 1:14-18 mentions the sun and moon and stars, and says they were made to be “for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.” If we are to believe that the days were actually long ages of time, then what were the seasons and years?

2) Romans 1:20 says, “Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made” (NIV). This verse claims that someone has been here to see and understand God’s power ever since the creation of the world. This poses no problem to those of us who believe that man was created within the same actual week that everything else was created. But, those who want to believe that each day represents a long “age” have a problem. If man was created eons after the other elements of creation were formed, then this makes no sense. This line of reasoning is confirmed by Jesus’ own statement in Mark 10:6. “From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.” The day/age theory places man at the end of millions or billions of years of geologic time. In light of these verses, it cannot be true.

3) If the days were actually long “ages”, then we have the wrong chronological order of events. For instance, plants were created on day three, but insects were not created until day five or six. But many plants depend on insects for cross-pollination, etc. How did plants survive for long “ages” without their needed counterparts in the insect world? Other similar problems of chronological order exist that strongly argue against the day/age theory.

We know that this day/age theory is commonly held by many who teach the false doctrine of theistic evolution. It is not true, and is actually an unnecessary attempt to compromise the truths taught in the Bible

with the unproven claims of some scientists. They teach that we live in an ancient universe, while in actuality we live in a relatively young universe that was created in six literal days by our omnipotent God. ■

Edification as a Work of the Church

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

We sometimes list the work of the church as three things:

1. Evangelism (preaching the gospel)
2. Edification (building up the church spiritually)
3. Benevolence (caring for the needy)

Properly understood, there is no problem with such a classification as far as it goes. But, I wonder if maybe we should be little more detailed as to how each fits in.

We usually list them in such a way that indicates that edification is a work separate from the others. But, is this really the case? A part of evangelism is that of edifying the church (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Assembly worship, in addition, to worshiping God is ordered to edify the church (1 Cor. 14:26). In fact, everything the church is authorized to do is not only to glorify God, but to edify or build up the church. Edification is really a thread that runs through it all, rather than a separate function. While evangelism, edification, and benevolence are indeed works of the church, each is not wrapped up a separate package. It is not that simple. Permit me to express it a little differently:

The work of the church is:

1. To evangelize (preach/teach the gospel) both saint and sinner. Sometimes this is done when the whole church is assembled. Sometimes it is done in classes arranged by the church. Sometimes it is done in private homes and other places.
2. To provide for assembly worship.
3. To give benevolent aid to fellow saints when needed.

Edification or building up the church is an integral part of each of the above. The church is edified by:

1. Its preaching/teaching work.
2. Its assembly worship.
3. Its fellowship with needy saints in the form of financial assistance. ■