

How Shall We Preach?



Yost H. Miller (1918-2009)

There are two types of preaching coming from pulpits, stemming from differing views of what constitutes the Gospel message. The one is often referred to as being “spiritual” and the other as “legalistic.” Although they should complement each other, they are often seen as contradicting one another. To make it as clear and simple as the Holy Spirit enables me to make it, please consider the following description of the two.

The so-called spiritual view assumes that if our preaching is Spirit-empowered, and composed of prayer-saturated, Christ-centeredness, it will not be necessary to name things that pertain to righteous and holy living, and that we must trust the Holy Spirit to do that for us. If any specific applications are made of what is holy or sinful, it is labeled as legalistic. Even though the applications are based on New Testament principles, it is seen as departing from grace and reverting to law for righteousness.

The other view likewise emphasizes total dependence upon God, the need for prayer, and the imperative of preaching Christ and Him crucified. In contrast, however, these also believe that Spirit-led preaching includes making clear what identifies with Bible principles of holiness and, on the other hand, what identifies with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Spirit-led preacher is not fearful of being labeled legalistic, but he is fearful of depreciating the Word of God by not making proper applications to life. He trusts the Holy Spirit to bring effective convic-

tion to both the principles and their applications. He is a proper requirement for true spiritual ministrations of the Word. Paul spelled out many applications along with the principles. (See 1 Corinthians 6:1-8; and chapters 7 and 8, as well as numerous other places).

Churches in Holmes and Wayne County, Ohio, witnessed a very effective demonstration of spelling out proper applications in 1951-56. George Brunk was used of God to bring sweeping revival at that time. We were given to see the positive side of what many call legalism today.

Brother George preached the Word of God vigorously and profoundly. He made applications and named things in a way that all who heard could understand clearly what obedience to the principle required of them. People repented with visible evidences. Restitutions were made. Worldly and sinful items were burned. There were testimonies of deliverance from tobacco, liquor, immorality, foul language, bitterness, worldly dress, jewelry, and so on.

Sinners were testified to and invited to come to Christ and the church. There was no room for abstract conversions without exterior evidence, as is too often the case. Store owners threw their tobacco out and quit selling it. Women wore their veils during the week, not only when they went to church. The Word of God grew mightily and prevailed.

An entire sermon was preached on the evils of television. There was no blushing about making applications of Bible principles against this tool so effectively used for evil mind control. Many ministers testified in the tent meetings about Sunday morning confession and testimony services in their churches taking up all the time, so that they didn't get to preach.

I mention this so that we may be bold to make applications and name things that need to be named. Let us not be intimidated by the fear of being labeled as legalists. Those who operate in the misty indefiniteness of superspirituality and its claims of pietistic excellence, have yet to prove the validity of their view.

Of course, as in all our preaching, we must guard against extremes, with a godly, Spirit-led sense of moderation and balance. We need straightforward preaching of

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pride need to be exposed. That which identifies with holiness, godliness, and righteousness needs to be promoted. Having done our duty we must still trust the Holy Spirit to bring conviction unto repentance with visible evidence, to the glory of God.

Some visiting evangelists refrain from this type of preaching, reasoning that they should just preach the Gospel. This leaves the making of applications entirely for the home ministers. This unwittingly leaves the impression that the Gospel is distinct from its practical

applications to life. That tends to undermine the efforts of the home ministerial team to keep biblical order in the church. But when evangelists and pastors all speak basically the same message (1 Co. 1:10), the church is edified and strengthened.

In summary, then, the first manner of preaching is essentially pietistic in its content. Its message is confined to the inward aspect of the Christian faith which, of course, is essential. But that alone ends in a certain incompleteness, without addressing also the exterior responses of the faith. "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." Ja. 2:18 When the inward aspect of faith does not bring our outward responses into proper balance, our faith is in question and our testimony is empty.

Unknown to far too many of our people, this was one of the basic distinctions between our Anabaptist heritage and mainline Protestants. Where Bible principles are taught without brotherly agreement on how they should be applied to life, there is always a predictable result, well-proven by history: there will be drifting toward the lifestyle of acculturated churches, and of the nonprofessing world as well.

So we must preach the Word of God "as they that must give account" (Hebrews 13:17), with an urgency that commands unto "the obedience of faith." Ro. 16:26 Even as Paul instructed Titus, "These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee." Ti. 2:15 ~

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