

November, 2004

Pause Ponder Profit

“Gone to Meddlin’”

By Stan Mitchell

One of the elders where I preach used this familiar phrase Sunday — you know the one. “Preacher, you quit preachin’ and gone to meddlin’.” It’s a sad day when preaching meddles in our marriages, meddles in our work ethics, meddles in our use of money. Of course that elder was kidding. But I like the phrase because it says something important. There is an idea out there, not quite said but believed nonetheless, that preaching isn’t supposed to actually demand lifestyle changes, commitment, or repentance.

It’s not supposed to suggest that some actions are morally wrong, or that if there are true teachings there must be false teachings, too. It’s not supposed to proclaim that there is a right way and a wrong way, or worse, that there is just one way, one truth, and one life (John 14:6). That’s so exclusive! We need to include all kinds of lifestyles! “Talk about theology, or esoteric subjects like how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. But don’t talk about the sin within the audience. Demand change in worship, but don’t demand change in hearts. Criticize the church of

Christ, but don’t criticize the sin in the lives of those who hear. Point out hypocrisy in church leaders, but don’t point it out in us!”

“Heaven has only one sermon — repentance,” says Charles Hodge, “Sinners cannot return to God with their sins. The good news begins with bad news! Peter’s first command on Pentecost was ‘repent’ (Acts 2:38).”

Sometimes a sermon’s intent is to inspire; sometimes its intent is to motivate; sometimes its intent is to comfort. And sometimes, beloved, its intent is to bring about repentance.

In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, “Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is near!” (Matthew 3:1,2)

So in a word, if it isn’t meddling, it isn’t preaching!

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“Neither Pleases Nor Offends”

By James Hahn

Nearly 40 years ago (November 20, 1964) an article under the title of “Are the Churches Coddling Atheists?” appeared in the denominational publication “Christianity Today” discussing a survey that had been conducted which revealed that there were “65,000 atheists in three American denominations.” The author noted that these atheists were not there as “inquirers and seekers” but were there “as members and have received baptism because in the judgment of the ministers, they are Christians.” The author asked a very appropriate question; “How does an atheist manage to feel at home within the membership” of these churches? I found his answer to be very interesting. He said, “the homiletical pabulum they receive from the pulpit must be such that it neither pleases nor offends their taste.”

With but few changes this article could be written about the conditions existing in many churches throughout the land which identify themselves as churches of Christ. The attitude of many of the preachers this denominational writer describes is an appropriate description of many preachers I know of. He says that many of the preachers urged that non-Christians ought not to be removed from the membership because “we show a greater concern and love for lost souls if we allow the admitted non-Christians to stay on the rolls in the hope that they will become Christians. We would offend such ‘members’ so it is asserted if we informed them plainly that they are not Christians.” The author expressed the hope that the “statistics of this investigation put an end to such bland nonsense and sentimentality.”

I like the observation the writer made

said, “According to the New Testament record, the preaching of our Lord drew believers to him, yet sent unbelievers away so that ‘they walked no more with him.’ In the preaching of the Apostle Paul there was always the possibility of being offended, and the very least his offended hearers did was leave. Authentic preaching of the Gospel in the pulpits of the American churches today will do the same.”

I believe this writer is right on this point. The preaching of truth as it should be preached will bring about a response. Some will be moved to ask, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37) and others will be moved to rejection of the truth and, sometimes, persecution upon the proclaimer of truth (Acts 7).

We may not have those who completely deny the existence of God among us, however there are those who reject the authority and teaching of Christ on many things who find acceptance within many churches throughout the land. There are adulterers who have no problem finding preachers who tell them they are OK in their sinful condition. Men can reject the teaching of Christ on the worship and work of the church; the Bible account of God creating the earth and all things therein in 6 days; and they can continue to find comfort in many congregations because “the homiletical pabulum they receive from the pulpit must be such that it neither pleases nor offends their taste.”

We need to be reminded of Paul’s charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-4. He said, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto

A Study Of The Sabbath

By Dan Richardson

A question of extreme importance today is that concerning the sabbath. Many are led to believe that the sabbath or seventh day of the week is to be observed as a holy day to God until the end of time. We invite the reader to a brief and honest investigation of the scriptures on this subject.

What Was The Sabbath?

The sabbath was a holy day of rest given to the Jews after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. As part of the ten commandments, the sabbath command was given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:8-11).

Several points of interest can be discussed from the Bible that will help us understand better this subject. First, the sabbath was given only to the Jews. *"I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"* (Exod. 20:2). *"And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day"* (Deut. 5:15). *"Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandst them commandments, and statutes, and a law by Moses thy servant"* (Nehemiah 8:13-14). All of the above verses testify that the sabbath day command was exclusive to the Jewish people — only they were brought out of Egypt and given a covenant through Moses on the Mount. The prophet Ezekiel teaches us the sabbath was a "sign" between God and Israel, "that they might

Consequently, and second, the sabbath was not given before Israel's bondage in Egypt and there is no Bible reference to my knowledge that teaches otherwise. It is said that God rested from His works of creation on the seventh day and that He hallowed it (Gen. 2:3). This cannot be denied. Nonetheless, we must understand this in light of the previous verses referred to. Deuteronomy 5:3 teaches that God's covenant to Israel, the sabbath included, was NOT made to their fathers before them but was to begin with that generation who miraculously crossed the Red Sea. We can only conclude that God used the same day on which He rested in creation, but the Bible does not teach the sabbath day was observed by man as holy from creation.

Finally, it is inferred from scripture that the Gentiles were excluded from the sabbath day command. It was a sign between God and Israel; not for all men.

The Sabbath Is Not Binding Today

It was part of a covenant that could not take away sins with its animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:4). It was a *"shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of those things"* (Heb. 10:1). God took away the old covenant that He might establish a "faultless" and "new" one with "better promises" (Heb. 8:6-13). In the New Testament, Paul said the old covenant was nailed to the cross. *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink or in respect to a feast day or a new moon or a SABBATH DAY (emphasis mine, D.R.): which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's"* (Colossians 2:14-16).

Some respond by saying the law of Moses was divided into a moral law (the ten commandments), and the ceremonial law (sacrifices, etc.), and that God only did away with the ceremonial aspects of that law and not the moral. But, we may note that the Bible makes no

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such distinction within the law; it makes no such divisions. To the contrary, the apostle Paul included one of the ten commandments in his argument showing the law of Moses had ceased at Christ's death, thus clearly showing the 10 commandments to be included in that which ended (Romans 7:6-8). In conclusion, seriously study Galatians 5:4

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fables." We must speak "the truth in love" but we must be ready to declare the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). In many places it is not what IS being said that is wrong, it is what is being left UNSAID that is the problem. As the writer of the previously mentioned article stated, "rarely is anything said from the pulpit that offends the man in the pew enough to make him get up and walk out, to return only when he is ready to do business with God."

It is indeed unusual for a denominational preacher to make the observations this writer made. If the truth is proclaimed as it should be declared then denominationalism will be exposed as being contrary to the teaching of Christ. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16). Refusing to speak out against error and compromising the truth may be pleasing to men and may result in increased numbers in attendance but it will not save the souls of those lost in sin. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).



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