

"NEITHER PLEASES NOR OFFENDS"

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 pablum 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 concerning the teaching of Jesus and Paul. He 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 pablum 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 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*" (Romans 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).

✍ James Hahn