

Preaching Sacrificed to Religion Gimmicks

"It has been interesting to observe that as preaching as such has been on the decline, preachers have more and more used people to give their testimonies; and particularly if they are important people in any realm.

This is said to attract people to the Gospel and to persuade them to listen to it. If you can find an admiral or a general or anyone who has some special title, a baseball player, an actor or actress, a film-star, a pop singer, or somebody well-known to the public, get them to give their testimony. This is deemed to be of much greater value than the preaching and the exposition of the Gospel." (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Preaching and Preachers.)

Many methods or religious extravaganza are now being used by sincere and devote Christians to boost their church attendance. I want to stress "now being used" as the phenomenon is rather a Johnny-come-late-on-the-scene. Church attendance can be increased they say through the finding of new methods.

Preaching is minimal. Other activities must fill the void. Scan your Saturday's church section of the newspaper. You'll find that many churches make their appeal with instrumental music, choirs, duets and trios as the chief feature rather than the preached Word of God. As preaching has come under fire and is on the decline there is as a consequence an increase of entertainment in public worship.

We must be continually changing things in order to make the worship services attractive. What is the result? The answer is simple. When you turn from preaching to something else you will find yourself undergoing a constant series of changes. You'll be forever looking for something new as the new of previous month has become already another habit.

I suggest that this trend is certainly not a sign of spiritual awakening or strength, but rather a symbol of spiritual boredom and weakness. That spiritual boredom to some degree almost everywhere among evangelical Christians is too evident to be denied. Church services are judged on a pragmatic basis.

If the result of a worship service is not a good feeling than our personal experience centred worshiper is not quite satisfied. The worship service has often been construed as a function of personal and subjective ends.

Orthodox Christians have during the last half century shown an increasing impatience with the things invisible and eternal and are demanding a host of things visible and temporal to satisfy their subjective needs. It is now the practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people, numerous attractions, but little serious instruction. As long as you can get the good feeling and the satisfaction why bother with the content of the faith?

Religious boredom can lead to serious problems. When Moses stayed on the mountain, the people of Israel became bored with their worship of the invisible Jehovah and clamored for a god they could see and touch. And they displayed more enthusiasm for the golden calf erected at such vast expense than they did for the Lord God of Abraham.

Of course any objections to the golden calf Christianity is met with fierce objection and the triumphant reply. "We are getting the crowds! We are winning them!" And winning them to what? To true self discipline and self denial? To separation from the world and sacrificial living for God? To becoming the promoters of the kingdom and witnesses for Christ?

The Reformer John Calvin mentioned that there were only three things that had to be kept in mind for a worship service: the proclamation of the Word of God, the offering of public prayers and the administering of the God-ordained sacraments. (Worship services should be objectively orientated and structured around the proclamation of the Word of God. The service should be the pursuit after God, the desire to listen to Him, and the communal activity of praise.

The study of church history has always a tonic effect upon me. The church has undergone difficulties, but she is still here and always will be here as she is the Lord's . This is a good realization. Fashions and vogues come one after another in the church. Each one creates excitement and is heralded as the thing that will change the church and make her relevant. But let us not forget that the main task of the church and the Christian ministry has always been and always will be the preaching of the Word.

A church will be attractive and strong when the Word is faithfully preached and the worshipers are ready to listen to what the Lord has to say. The real attraction should still be the Lord of the Scriptures. What greater excitement can one have than to hear the gospel message and to respond to that message with hymns of praise?

Johan D. Tangelder
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