

# Challenges Confronting the Church

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. There can be no doubt that what is good and holy is under attack in America.
  - 1. For example, on April 25, some homosexual activists are sponsoring a “Day of Silence” in American schools.
    - a. As part of this day teachers and students are encouraged to say nothing all day to “echo the silence” homosexual students face every day. Students and teachers will also pass out cards teaching that homosexuality is simply an “alternative” lifestyle.
    - b. According to the website of the homosexual coalition, hundreds of thousands of schools with several million pupils will participate.
  - 2. Within the church, Satan is active in pulling people away from truth and righteousness.
- B. The Lord warned us this would be the case.
  - 1. “False prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destructions. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed” (2 Pt 2:1-2).
  - 2. “The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths” (2 Tm 4:3-4).
- C. Tonight, we want to look at some of the main challenges confronting the church in order to stand against them.
  - 1. We will, as with the case of the “Day of Silence,” use real-life examples, not to berate some of our brethren, but to prepare ourselves for what’s coming.
  - 2. What are the challenges confronting the church? THE CHALLENGE OF WORSHIP, THE CHALLENGE OF PREACHING, THE CHALLENGE OF THE WOMEN’S ROLE, THE CHALLENGE OF DENOMINATIONALISM, & THE CHALLENGE OF BAPTISM.

## THE CHALLENGE OF WORSHIP

- A. Worship has long been a way that Satan has successfully taken men captive.
  - 1. “In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell” (Gn 4:3-5).
  - 2. When the kingdom was first divided, we discover that Jeroboam, the king of Israel, built golden calves to keep the people from going to Jerusalem for worship: 1 Ki 12:28-33.
- B. The Lord has always deserved and desired worship according to his standards.
  - 1. Jesus told the woman at the well: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24).
  - 2. “I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations” (Mal 1:14b). “Fear” here means “honor” or “worship.”
- C. While the Lord deserves and desires true worship, true worship is becoming foreign even among churches of Christ.
  - 1. According to the January 2007 issue of *The Christian Chronicle* the largest congregation of churches of Christ in the United States has added a service with both instrumental music and communion on Saturday night.
  - 2. In many congregations truth has been sacrificed at the altar of popularity.
    - a. We live in a very consumer-driven culture.
      - 1) There is nothing wrong with a consumer-driven culture when it comes to shopping at Wal-Mart or Target.
      - 2) However, when we come into the house of God, there is absolutely no place for a consumer—driven culture or doing what’s popular.

- b. Worship is a place to honor God in the way he has directed.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF PREACHING**

- A. There is no more solemn duty than the preaching of Scripture.
  - 1. “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tm 4:1-2).
  - 2. “An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what twill you do when the end comes?” (Jer 5:30-31).
- B. Much of what passes as preaching today is not Bible preaching, but it’s pop-psychology, felt needs, current events, and the like.
  - 1. I have seen many sermon outlines that use very few Scriptures.
  - 2. I have heard many sermons that are nothing more than a collection of neat little stories with maybe a biblical passage thrown in here or there for good measure.
  - 3. I remember one meeting in particular at a church I was working with at the time.
    - a. The guest speaker was a good orator and he would have been perfect for an “after dinner” speech.
    - b. He would weave a bunch of stories together and then he may quote a verse or two to back up his story.
    - c. I remember one night—I counted—he quoted three brief Scriptures and then told stories the rest of the time.
  - 4. Whatever that is, it is not preaching! And, it does not deserve our attention.
- C. You know that I love a good sermon illustration.
  - 1. Jesus used sermon illustrations (i.e., parables) and he even used visual aids (e.g., a child to talk about humility).
  - 2. Stories, illustrations, quotations, visuals have their place in preaching, but they dare not be the content!
  - 3. What is to be the content of preaching?
    - a. Remember what Paul told Timothy: “Preach the word.”
    - b. Paul told the Ephesian elders: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).
    - c. The call of the prophets makes clear their work was to proclaim the Word of God.
      - 1) “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with MY WORDS to them” (Ezek 3:4).
      - 2) “Whatever I command you, you shall speak” (Jer 1:7).
- D. As I come to this pulpit, I do not come to say what I think or believe or want or believe what is needed—I am to come and proclaim the Word of God, nothing more and nothing less.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF DENOMINATIONALISM**

- A. Denominationalism is one of the largest blemishes the world has ever seen.
  - 1. “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:20-21). Jesus, knowing that his life is about to end, pours out his heart to the Father that his believers might be one.
  - 2. Jesus died that he “might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Eph 2:16).
    - a. In context Paul is talking about the division between Jew and Gentile, and it would be a big mistake for me to take this out of context—I have just mentioned the necessity of preaching Scripture.
    - b. However; notice a very real principle here—Jesus died to create ONE BODY!
    - c. Every time a sect breaks off the break-aways are destroying the dream of unity for which the Lord Jesus died.
- B. There is a growing trend among congregations to cozy up to denominations in the search of unity.
  - 1. Unity is important.
    - a. Jesus prayed, and we must absolutely work for that unity.
    - b. At the same time, we dare not sacrifice truth for unity.
  - 2. Unfortunately, too many churches across this country are willing to do that very thing.

- a. We have witnessed some of that in our own community.
- b. In the July 2004 issue of *The Christian Chronicle* an article appeared about cooperation between churches of Christ and independent Christian Churches.
  - 1) Two churches in Lexington, Kentucky—one, a congregation of the churches of Christ, and the other, an independent Christian Church—have joined together to begin a Spanish-speaking church.
  - 2) At the Spanish-speaking church, services alternate between instrumental and a capella worship.
- c. We could amplify examples many times over but such activity has become so common that (1) It would take a long time to give such examples; and (2) You are familiar with a lot of this move toward unity at any cost.

## THE CHALLENGE OF WOMEN'S ROLE

- A. We are all aware of what Scripture teaches concerning the role of women in the assembly.
  1. "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a [woman] is [man], and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor 11:3).
  2. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tm 2:12-14).
    - a. So many folks say that Paul had a problem with women, that this was a cultural thing, or women were teaching error in Ephesus, where Timothy was working.
    - b. However Paul ties this prohibition to none of those things—but to Creation itself. Therefore, it has always been that women could not have leadership over men, and it shall always be that way.
- B. The main objection to this principle that many of my brethren raise comes from Gal 3:28.
  1. That text reads: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
    - a. Of course, there is equality in the sexes.
    - b. We mentioned a couple weeks ago that point from 1 Cor 11:11-12: "In the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God."
    - c. As I emphasized in that sermon from 1 Cor 11, a difference in role does not in any way mean that one is inferior I have a different role in this congregation than you, but that in absolutely no way makes me better before God than you.
  2. There is a website, Gal328.org, that encourages "Gender justice" in churches of Christ. The website defines "Gender justice" in this way: "In general, gender justice means recognizing that men and women are created by God, redeemed by Christ, and gifted by the Spirit truly without distinction or partiality. In Christian community, gender justice means encouraging both men and women to exercise their Spirit-given gifts in the church's work, worship, and leadership, and celebrating the truth that the Spirit grants such gifts without respect to gender. Concretely, gender justice in the Church of Christ includes opening traditionally masculine leadership roles and activities [deacon, elder, minister, worship leader, preacher, teacher, etc.] to women, and encouraging men to discover and cultivate their gifts for activities traditionally performed by women."
  3. There is true gender justice in every congregation which follows Scripture.
    - a. In denying women a place of leadership, we are not consigning them to a place of inferiority.
    - b. Rather; we are encouraging women to use their God-given gifts in their God-given role in the church.

## CONCLUSION

- A. There is no doubt but that we are living in the time prophesied by Paul when men will not endure sound doctrine.
  1. Roy Lanier, Jr., a well-known preacher in our brotherhood and former instructor at Bear Valley Bible Institute, sat down for an interview in the April 2002 issue of *The Christian Chronicle*.
  2. *The Chronicle* asked Brother Lanier about aspects the church has neglected in his preaching and teaching. Here is what he had to say:
    - a. First does the current generation know who we are? We are in a serious identity crisis. Are we just another denomination, or are we identical to the church the Lord built (Matt 16:18)? Too many of our

scholars have imbibed at the tables of denominational pap. They find the courage to criticize brethren, but do not have the courage to criticize their denominational teachers and friends.

- 1) One can read clear and simple descriptions of the Lord's people in the New Testament. No description or mention of any denomination can be found in the New Testament.
  - 2) Who among us is still willing to proclaim these truths? Our folks have not heard this for years, and they surely need to know these distinctions.
- b. Second current cries for tolerance can compromise the truth. Truth is not relative; experience, feelings, choice and opinions do not change the words of our Lord.
- 1) Too many discussions and forums today are simply a pooling of ignorance. Incompetent teachers, skilled in communication, but almost illiterate in doctrine, are feeding our churches sophomoric soup that could be obtained in most denominational churches.
  - 2) New trends that excite, stir feelings and answer questions the Lord never asked are taken into the bosoms of misled men and women. University administrations have been too lenient in suffering brilliant scholarly teachers to confuse students who can only leave school with more questions than answers. Too many elders have been too lenient and patient with men in their pulpits who clearly teach unsound doctrines.
- c. Third we need to answer the same questions our forefathers answered on the frontiers of America and Europe: who is saved and who is lost; how is one saved when is one saved how is one assured of salvation, what worship pleases God and with whom are we in fellowship? Answers were found in God's Word.
- B. But, what about the future of the church?
1. "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!" (2 Tm 2:8-9).
  2. "Let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29). Are you honoring that God who is a consuming fire?