

# THE BELLEVILLE MESSENGER

May 10

2009

## Pleasing Men or God

The problem of men being more concerned about pleasing other men rather than God is not new. In John 12:43 we see that many of the chief rulers who believed on Jesus would not confess Him, "*For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*" The question Paul raised and answered in Galatians 1:10 needs to be brought to the attention of all today. He said, "*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.*"

The following article deals with a far too prevalent attitude in the world today and I fear is more common among some brethren than we would like to believe. I would encourage all, especially those who would preach the gospel, to be determined to please God rather than seeking to please men. Paul admonished Timothy to "*preach the word*" (2 Timothy 4:2). This may not conform to popular opinion and it may not result in attracting the largest crowds but it will result in the salvation of the souls of those who hear and obey and in God being glorified. Isn't this what we should desire? (JH)



## Doctrinal Preaching

The author of a recognized textbook on speech-making tenders some advice on pulpit speaking, pointing out that "*purely doctrinal sermons are not much desired in this age, for most people are impatient with quibblings of creed.*" This advice comes with poor grace from a person whose interest in religion, I venture, is only nominal, if not nil. It is doubtful that he would know a gospel sermon

if he heard one, yet he feels that his position as an authority on secular speaking qualifies him to tell preachers not only how the sermon should be delivered, but also what the content of the sermon should be. Preachers should not speak on doctrine, because people in this advanced (?) age do not desire that type of sermon, is his advice.

The eminent authority makes two blunders. First, he ventures into a field where he is not qualified, and second, he makes the mistake of telling preachers that the content of their sermons should be what the people desire instead of what the Lord commands. This is not so astonishing, coming, as it does, from a modernistic college professor who is also a denominationalist. Of course, he would hardly be expected to know—and probably would not care if he did know—that Paul said that the preacher who tried to please men (that is, preach the type of sermons which are desired in this age) could not be the servant of Christ. Perhaps, his admonition was intended primarily for denominational preachers who are in the business as men-pleasers, and think that much of the advice in the New Testament is not modernistic enough for a streamlined, twentieth century sermon. To them the doctor's advice may be a pearl of great price, but to a gospel preacher it is abominable.

It would be difficult to think of a thing any more ridiculous than the doctor's suggestion. Nothing can hardly equal his stupidity, unless it is an insurance salesman who knows nothing about religious journalism, yet thinks that his financial success and prestige will qualify him to tell our religious editors how to run their papers. Even the youngest of us feel that we know a little more than the professor of speech when it comes to what a gospel sermon should contain. He can tell people how to make the halls of Congress reverberate with gems of political oratory, but we think he needs a few lessons on the fundamentals of the gospel before he starts telling us what to include and what to exclude in our sermons. In the same vein, it seems that the competent religious editor would feel that a cracker jack insurance salesman ought to take a course in the A B C's of religious journalism before he begins an effort to revolutionize our papers. People are not led to live lives of faith and obedience in the same way that they are led to invest their money in bonds and insurance policies. A man may be without an equal in telling us how to compose and deliver a political speech or a speech given purely for entertainment, and yet

be a dismal failure when it comes to telling us how to preach the gospel. Even so, a man may make a million dollars selling insurance, and then make a complete failure in religious journalism. Indeed, it seems that we have living examples to prove both of these statements.

The cases of the speech instructor and the insurance salesman are parallel. Both have just about the same conception of the gospel; one says that we should preach what is desired in this age, while the other makes a brotherhood survey to determine what type of religious journalism is desired today. However, it does seem that the speech teacher has one advantage; he knew what people desired without sending out a questionnaire. If the insurance salesman had been a close observer of human nature, and could have sensed the trend of modern thought as well as the speech instructor did, he might have been spared the trouble (and shall we now say the humiliation?) of the survey.

What about doctrinal preaching? Every gospel preacher must choose between what is desired in this age and the kind of preaching that the Bible says for us to do. The early Christians continued in the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). It is obvious that the apostles must have preached doctrine. People obey a form of doctrine in becoming children of righteousness (Romans 6:17). How can preaching save people, unless it presents the doctrine, and shows people how to obey *"that form of doctrine?"* Paul warned against preaching any other doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3). This implies that there is a doctrine to be preached. Timothy was told to give attendance to doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13,16). Maybe Paul and others knew that in this age people would not desire doctrine, and hence gospel preachers would have to give it a little emphasis. Paul must have had something like that in mind when he told Timothy to preach with doctrine, for the time would come when people would not endure – would not desire – sound doctrine (2 Timothy 4:2,3). Those who have so much free information on how to preach ought to get together with Paul, or show us that Paul was wrong. Paul said for us to preach doctrine, because people would not desire it; man tells us to omit doctrine when it is not desired. One of the two has given the wrong advice, and personally, I think that Paul is not the one.

What about doctrinal preaching? The afore mentioned speech teacher makes a distinction between a doctrinal sermon and a gospel

sermon. After discrediting doctrinal sermons, he speaks with approval of "the gospel sermon or sermons intended to draw inspiration and encouragement from the great religious truths of the gospel, and through this inspiration to lead audiences to apply these truths to their own lives." How ridiculous is such a distinction! Doctrine is nothing but "the great religious truths of the gospel." Imagine a man drawing inspiration from "great religious truths" without preaching those truths. How can a preacher lead people "to apply these truths to their own lives" without preaching the truths—the doctrine—so people can know what the truths are?

What about doctrinal preaching? It is a common thing to hear someone say, "We ought not to preach doctrine so much; we should exhort people more." Not so long ago a denominational preacher visited one of our services, and at the close he favored us with this comment: "That is just the trouble; we have too much doctrinal preaching and not enough convincing preaching." This reminds one of the little boy who went out to shoot the birds, but didn't take his shooter along. Nobody denies that we should exhort and convince people. Too many preachers, however, go out to exhort without the exhorter. They go out to convince without the convincer. Paul said that elders should exhort and convince the gainsayers, but that they should be able to do it with sound doctrine (Titus 1: 9). It takes doctrine to exhort and convince people in the right way.

✍ Frank Van Dyke

## **Belleville church of Christ**

5635 S County Rd 200E - Belleville, IN - (317) 539-5258

[www.bellevillechurch.net](http://www.bellevillechurch.net)

### **Schedule of Services**

Sun. Bible Study... 9:30 a.m.  
Sun. Morning Worship... 10:30 a.m.  
Sun. Evening Worship... 5:00 p.m.  
Wed. Bible Study... 7:00 p.m.

### **Elders**

Charles Carpenter... (317) 839-3873  
James Hahn... (317) 745-1507

### **Deacons**

Leon Nevins... (317) 272-2966  
Don Perry... (765) 676-5825  
Alvin Stanley... (317) 831-3514

### **Evangelist**

James Hahn... (317) 745-1507