
Words of Truth

A Congregation Is Not Sound Because Of The Preacher

By: Brian A. Yeager

Many times over the years I have noticed a constant trend among those looking for a “sound congregation” to visit or be a local member of. That constant trend is that people are more concerned about the preacher working with that congregation than anything else. It is valid to inquire about who is teaching and what is being taught. The word of God says: *“Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them”* (Ephesians 5:6-11).

A preacher/evangelist can certainly make a congregation unsound. An erring preacher’s presence and/or teaching causes all who are in fellowship with him to be transgressors of God’s word (II Corinthians 6:14-18 and II John 1:9-11). Transgressors of God’s word are sinners (I John 3:4) and are thus lost in that state of being (Romans 6:23). There will always be clever false teachers (II Peter 2:1-3). So, the man doing the preaching and teaching is certainly a good place to start looking in evaluating a congregation. Don’t just look at what he teaches though. You must look at how he lives as well. A preacher who teaches the truth can still be in damnable error by not living what he preaches (Romans 2:1-29). Men that take on the work of an evangelist are supposed to visibly practice what they teach (I Corinthians 9:27 and I Timothy 4:15-16). You have to examine them closely to see if they are living the part or just playing the part (Matthew 7:15-20).

Having said all of that, does a man in the pulpit automatically sanctify the people in the seats in front of him? Can a congregation have a man preaching and living the truth while they are not? Every congregation I have ever worked with was NOT sound when I began working with them. The work of an evangelist is, in part, to set things in order that are lacking in local churches of Christ (Titus 1:5). That means, when an evangelist doing the work right first arrives at a congregation, things are likely OUT OF ORDER. So, he may be 100% right in what he says and does. The people in front of him may not. Additionally, even the most faithful of teachers cannot assure anyone that those they are teaching are doing what is taught. You have heard of Judas, right (Luke 22:48)? Who was his teacher (John 6:70-71)? Do you get the point? You have to look beyond the pulpit when examining a congregation.

Sometimes There Is A Separation From The Pulpit To The Pew

Let me first say that the subtitle of this section of the article is not intended to infer a congregation must have a pulpit or pews. Congregations can assemble in many different places (i.e. Acts 20:7-11 and Romans 16:3-5). I am just using language to draw a thought.

Now, let's discuss our point. A congregation's faithfulness is determined by much more than just what is taught. The congregation in Corinth erred, in one way, because they were not united (I Corinthians 1:10-13). The congregation in Corinth erred, in another way, because they had a fornicator among them (I Corinthians 5:1-13). The congregation in Pergamos was in error for having members who believed certain false doctrines (Revelation 2:12-17). The congregation in Thyatira erred because of an influential woman causing others to sin (Revelation 2:18-23). The congregation in Sardis erred because there were members who were spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1-3). While we could go on, you should notice something about all of the errors above. That something is that a preacher in any of those congregations was not the problem. The problem was from members who were NOT standing in proverbial pulpits.

Many times the largest problems that congregations face are not coming from the man doing the teaching. The problems congregations face most often are from those who are creeping in unawares (Jude 1:4). When Paul met with the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:17ff.) he warned them that error would be introduced into that congregation from without and from within (Acts 20:28-31). He said nothing about their "preacher".

In places wherein I have taught the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; error still abounded. That has happened several times here in El Paso. Like the Apostles and Jesus, we have had several like Judas amongst us. The erring are sneaky (Galatians 2:1-5). So, while I stood up front and preached against fornication, lying, alcoholism, divisiveness, and other sins; we had fake members engaged in such sinful activities. My sermons and classes did not make us wholly sound as a congregation. We had several spiritually diseased members. Remember that in the future. Learn from it. Sound teachers and sound teaching does not necessarily equal a wholly sound congregation.

Conclusion

You cannot always know everyone in a congregation (I Timothy 5:24-25). Having said that, don't think that the man in the pulpit sanctifies the rest of the congregation. I have proven that. Look beyond the worship service. Look beyond the teacher and teachings. Look at the members. Remember that a little leaven ruins the whole lump (Galatians 5:9). BE CAREFUL not to allow someone else to ruin your hope of eternal life because you only looked at the surface of a congregation (Ecclesiastes 9:18 and I Timothy 5:22).