

A Preoccupation With Attitudes

"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." -- Phil. 1:18.

Proper attitudes are so important in our dealings with other folks. Right motives are essential to our pleasing God. Brethren have been justly criticized at times for their attitudes and motives - including myself. A few speakers (and writers) among us have seemed to be more interested in making points with brethren by skinning the opposition alive than by trying to reach them with truth - as though being confident of the truth gives one the license to be rude, crude and down right obnoxious. This by no means is intended to indict all those great men of the past (or present) who obviously have preached and defended the truth in love.

As is so often the case, we tend to swing from one extreme to the other. I am beginning to detect a dangerous preoccupation with attitudes and motives -- especially among some younger brethren. Whereas, at times, it seemed that it mattered little HOW or WHY one preached, just so WHAT he preached was the truth - it seems that many are more concerned now with HOW and WHY one presents a lesson than WHAT is taught and practiced. I even heard one preacher state in a prayer that love is more important than being right!

It is not uncommon for such brethren to scathingly criticize and even turn away from brethren, admitting that WHAT they teach and practice is the truth but they don't like their attitudes. And at the same time lavishly praising and even embracing others, who admittedly teach questionable doctrines, because they think these have a better attitude than the others. So, when controversy arises (as it inevitably will) these attitude watchers will base where they will stand upon who has the best attitude and disposition - rather than the merit of the positions taken by the disputants.

We need to remember that no side on any religious question has a monopoly on any attitude - good or bad! You will find hate, envy, strife, and general ugliness among the advocates of every position known. You will find kindness, love, peacefulness, and general sweetness among all. You will find all of these in all churches and among those of every religious persuasion known to man. Am I defending the improper attitudes among those who agree with me on doctrinal matters? No, a thousand times no! If we "preach Christ from selfish ambition, nor sincerely" or "from envy and strife" without love - we will have to answer to God for such ungodly attitudes and motives!

Yet, if one hears and obeys the truth taught in an improper spirit and from an improper motive - it will save him. The teacher may be lost for his attitude - but the hearer will be saved if he obeys that truth from the heart. If one hears and obeys a lie taught in a proper spirit and from a sincere motive - it will condemn him just as much as it would if it had been preached to him by one with an ungodly attitude. A preacher may have the best "way about him" in the world, but if he keeps from me some vital truth that I need to know his "way about him" will not save me - but the truth that was withheld would have!

If one works and worships in a congregation that practices the truth (i.e., WHAT
See ATTITUDES, Page 4.

Is Fear A Motive For Serving God?

Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.

There are some who; wanting to emphasize God's grace, mercy, and goodness; tell us that because of these wonderful attitudes of God and because of the blood of Christ we are now free from the fear motivation for serving God. They want to emphasize that we are to serve God because of His goodness and that fear of punishment is an improper motive for serving Him. Is this really what the Bible teaches?

It is true that we are taught to serve God and be obedient to Him because of all the goodness that He has granted to us (See James 1:17,18; John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-11). Because of all that God has done for us and given us, we should be willing and ready to listen to Him, obey Him and live for Him. Truly, when one considers all of God's goodness, it is ample motivation to serve Him always. However, we are also taught that fear of God and His wrath are also reasons for serving Him. It is fear of His wrath as well as gratitude and love of His goodness that keeps us in His service. In Romans 11:20-22, we are told that God will cut off those who are disobedient. We are told to consider the goodness and severity of God. I am to serve God not only because I know of all the great things that He has blessed me with, but also because I know that I will receive punishment from Him if I am disobedient (See II Pet. 3:10,11).

Yes, fear of God and His punishment is a proper motive for obedience to Him. It was partly because of fear that the Ephesians repented (Acts 19:17-20). It is fear that helps us to continue in God's service and not fall short (Heb. 4:1; I Cor. 10:12). It is with fear that we conduct ourselves in this life and work out our salvation (I Pet. 1:13-19; Phil 2:12,13). The fear of God causes us to depart from evil and to do good (Prov. 16:6). If I didn't believe that fear was a proper motive for obedience, I would quit preaching to men concerning God's coming judgment and the punishment that is going to come upon the wicked. After all, I don't want to improperly motivate men to serve God. Paul, however, recognized that God's wrath was one reason men must turn to Him (II Cor. 5:10,11). Let us learn to "fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 28:10).

Can one be free from the fear of God's punishment and the fear of His wrath? Certainly. How is this accomplished? First, let us look at how it is not accomplished. Men have devised many doctrines and schemes to free man from this fear that are not supported by God's word. Some claim if one only has faith in Christ Jesus then his salvation is secure regardless as to how he conducts himself here on earth. As one creed book puts it: "The doctrine of faith only is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." But can faith alone give us such "comfort"? When one "accepts Christ as his personal savior", does he at that point free himself from the fear of God's judgment regardless of what he does from then on? Many teach this. God's word, however, does not support it. Others claim that the life of Christ is substituted for our lives when we accept Christ. They claim we can be free from the punishment of God, because God will not look at our sinfulness, but at the righteousness of Christ. So, the imputed righteousness of Christ is said to free us from fear. Again, there is no support from Scripture. There are still others who want to take away fear by claiming that one can be forgiven of sin without meeting God's requirements of confession and prayer. In summary, any system that offers forgiveness of sins without meeting God's conditions for forgiveness, also offers an escape from the fear of God's punishment. But it offers a false escape.

How then can we be free from the fear of God's wrath? Only through one way - total submission to God and His will (Matt. 7:21-23). We must do the things God requires of us, if we are going to be free from the fear of His condemnation. We can choose how we are going to live. If we live after our own fleshly desires we must be

See FEAR, Page 4.

Love It Or Leave It

Ed Harrell

It is difficult to keep one's thinking truly undenominational. Proud, carnal attitudes constantly make their way into spiritual affairs. The sources of jealousy and strife today are the same carnal attitudes that plagued the Corinthian church (I Cor. 3:1:5)

I think few people have complained more about the mental and spiritual shortcomings of modern churches of Christ than I have. I intend to continue to do just that. We must guard against party factions, against denominational conceptualizations, against becoming simply another sect. The concept of undenominational Christianity must be treasured by us and taught to the world. But...

But I am troubled. Sometimes I am troubled when I hear others criticize (or admonish) because I wonder if our motives are the same and I wonder if our solutions are the same. I reprove my brethren because I love them, not because I find them unattractive. I am concerned about the inadequacies in churches of Christ because I consider them to be precisely that -- churches of Christ, the hope of the world.

It seems to me that many of the young critics of the church today proceed on an entirely different assumption. The criticisms do not reflect an intrinsic love and respect for simple faith but a personal revulsion against simplicity of faith and against simple people. Their call for a deeper individual commitment to godliness, comes off sounding like a rejection of literal obedience and the acceptance of authority. I feel I am being faced with the ancient choice of being either right or righteous.

In short, I sometimes hear young men saying the same things that I think need saying -- but our thoughts lead us to act in different ways. I like simple, plain preaching done by a corn-fed Alabama preacher (even at the risk of a passage being taken out of context). They like the evangelical scholars (few having attained the elevated intellectual status of appreciating sophisticated liberal scholarship) and yearn for their fellowship. I like conservative churches, even though some of them are contentious, and some do not understand undenominational Christianity (by the way, I think that most do). They find the spirit much sweeter in liberal churches, even in denominational churches, though they are often less frank in saying so. (And is it possible to imagine that one would find an understanding of undenominational here?). The difference between us are profound in act if not in word. I believe their actions reflect serious misunderstandings about the nature of the church of our Lord, about the quality of those who hold that faith today, and about the quality of religion in a sectarian world.

One final point. Be honest. I have no respect for a man who hides his convictions behind rhetoric. If one believes that the churches of Christ in this country are the Lord's people in our time, fighting his battles, being faithful to His patterns, then let's try to build up the cause and expand the borders of the Kingdom. If one believes that the "conservative churches of Christ" are an unenlightened, often bigoted, partially correct, contentious wing of the "Christian world" that one happens to be trapped in because of family and traditional loyalties, then let's get that understanding up front. I can appreciate most anyone's work in the Kingdom (even if it seems unenlightened to me) if I can see that he love it. When one's affections turn to other places, then it is time to leave. -- from The Westview Weekly, Athens, AL.

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OUR SERVICES: Sunday Classes 9:45 AM - Sunday Worship Assemblies 10:45 & 6:00 PM
Wednesday Classes 7:30 PM

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ATTITUDES - From Page 1

is done is scriptural), thus joining in that work and worship, he can be right even if some of the others do it from an improper spirit and motive. However, if one works and worships in a congregation that, as a congregation, practices error - thus joining in that unscriptural worship and work - he is still worshipping and working in vain even if every member there is sincere, concerned, and loving in his attitudes.

If our attitudes are wrong let's correct them. If we detect wrong attitudes in others try to help them correct them. But, let us not get so obsessed with looking at the attitudes and motives of brethren that we decide the merits of what they advocate based upon these factors. It is a dangerous obsession. It can cause us to miss some vital truth because we didn't like the way it was said or we didn't like the personality of the one presenting it. It can cause us to believe a lie because it was presented in such a splendid manner by a personality that you could not help but admire. It can cause one to think that a man's message cannot be right because his attitude is bad or that a man's message must be right because his attitude is good. In fact, the most dangerous person in the world is an advocate of error who lovingly presents his error from an obviously sincere heart - like, Absalom, he steals the hearts of the people blinding them to the true nature WHAT he teaches.

Sure, I had rather a man tell me the truth in a way that impresses me with his concern for my feelings as well as the salvation of my soul. I had rather that he didn't come across in a harsh and abrasive way. But, If I must chose between him and one that has a smile that would qualify him for a Pepsident commercial and shows me all the understanding, love, and concern that anyone could possibly show, but keeps the truth from me-- I will take the one who tells me the truth every time.

Let us learn to receive the word with all readiness of mind and search the scriptures to see if it is so (cf. Acts 17:11) and take our stand based upon that, rather than based upon the attitude, either good or bad, of those who teach us. Let us be concerned about attitudes among us but let us not become so preoccupied with them that we make them blind us to either truth or error. Nor let them be the primary factor in deciding where we will attend services regularly. Let us learn to rejoice when the TRUTH is preached - even when attitudes need improvement. If Paul could rejoice that "Christ is preached", even in pretense, why can't we? - Editor.

FEAR - From Page 2

ready to accept the consequences. If, however, we choose to live in the way God's word directs us we can be free from the fear of punishment (See Rom. 8:12-17). Keeping God's word frees us from fear in the day of judgment (See I John 2:5; 4:17,18). We can now have boldness in that day because of our obedience. The realization that we will suffer consequences for not continuing in our service to God can and should cause us to take greater care to follow God completely and not turn from our service of Him (See Heb. 10:26-39). If fear is one's only motivation in serving God, then something is wrong. But fear is a proper motive for obedience as well as love, gratitude, etc. (Heb. 12:28,29).

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