

SHH! THE NEIGHBORS MIGHT HEAR US

"I hear that there are divisions
among you,
and in part I believe it."
-- 1 Corinthians 11:18

In our family discussions -- your family has arguments, ours has discussions -- someone may be heard to say, "Shh! The neighbors might hear us."

This is a wise admonition, because the issues of our discussions are mostly trivial, in a few years they will not matter. Besides neighbors are so wrapped up in their own problems that they don't need to be bothered with ours anyway.

I hear brethren express the same sentiment about problems among brethren. They are saying, in effect, "Shh! The neighbors might hear us." My brother, that is a horse of a different color. First, our neighbors already know a lot more about "our problems" than many brethren do. Secondly, a people primarily interested in truth loses nothing by dealing openly and frankly with its own shortcomings. The Kingdom of God is strong enough to survive and thrive without glossing over what every really informed person already knows - Christians sometimes argue, sin, and backslide. Christians suffer all the woes common to humanity and many other things as result of their faith. We have nothing to lose by the negative being right up front with the positive.

"Our neighbors" are sometimes wiser than many of "us" in this respect. In an article, in PULPIT HELPS, a writer said it well:

"The positive 'gospel' is erroneous in two respects. The first of these is in its origin, or the cause which gave it rise. That origin is nothing less than pure sales psychology. You have a 'product' to sell. In order to sell it, you must be at pains to present nothing in your sales 'pitch' but what will contribute to the sale. Above all, you must not in any way antagonize the prospect, discourage him, or say anything that would militate against your objective, which is the sale that you seek. That is the fundamental idea and purpose back of 'the positive approach.' It is the

objective of selling, with its requirement to bend every effort and direct every consideration to that end. It is to be especially noted that the primary interest is not to present truth, but to achieve the pre-determined objective.

"...The simple fact of the matter is, in God's kingdom, we are not in the 'selling' business. Oh, how the modern church needs to learn that basic reality! It is not our job to 'sell' Christ or the Gospel to this generation; hence, man's sales psychology is wholly inapplicable to our assignment. The sooner we learn that, the quicker we can begin to get back to the purity of apostolic religion and tactics. Our mission is to preach the Word of God (II Tim. 4:2), including all the great mass of 'negative' doctrine in it, and earnestly call upon men to heed and obey it while time and opportunity are theirs. The Bible plainly says it is God's prerogative to give "the increase" (I Cor. 3:7). Let us not become so engrossed with the divine part of the enterprise - the increase - that we fatally water down or mutilate the message by deleting from it all that men in their self-love and ambition, have designated as 'negative.'" (Are You Selling or Proclaiming the Gospel, by Fred D. Blakely)

We would do well to give some thought to this bit of wisdom from one not a member of the church of Christ. Concerned, honest, and sincere Christians are heard to say that they are afraid for friends, neighbors or new converts to read many papers published by brethren - not because of any error taught, but because they deal openly with problems among brethren. Or that they are afraid to bring them to some of our classes because they would be exposed to "our internal problems". They want them to have only a "positive" image of "us". It might cause them to not want to become "one of us". We have been chided for dealing with problems among brethren, in this paper, since it goes to some outsiders. Should we just present "positive Christianity" to the world and keep our problems more behind the

scenes. Sounds good! But, is it the approach that the Lord would have us take?

Think brethren! If one wants to keep reading material that tells of and deals with problems among brethren from falling into the "wrong hands", then let him get the Bibles that he passes out bound up in selected sections - so that he can give only certain sections to strong brethren and withhold from outsiders and weak brethren sections that frankly deal with "brotherhood problems."

Be careful with 1 Corinthians. It tells of a fornicating brother and the church's negligence in dealing with him. It openly reveals that there were shameful law-suits against other brethren, jealousy and confusion over spiritual gifts, and revellings connected with the Lord's Supper. What if a non-Christian or weak brother were to get hold of that - would it not so discourage and disgust him that he would quit!

Keep Galatians in your briefcase and give it only to those whom you are sure are seasoned veterans of the cross. It lets the cat out of the bag that there are "false brethren". It tells about Peter's (a rather "big name" preacher in the church) playing the hypocrite - all laid out there for anyone to read.

One might consider blacking out certain other portions. Those parts that tell that one of Jesus hand-picked apostles betrayed him, another shamefully denied him on the night of his betrayal. Maybe the 15th chapter of Acts ought not to fall into the hands of anyone but the strongest of Christians. It tells of a big debate, involving some leading men of the brotherhood, over a doctrinal matter within the church! It also reports that two of our leading brethren got into such a heated exchange that they finally wound up going separate ways into Asia Minor. And, by all means, keep the book of Revelation away from such people. Besides it being so deep and hard to understand, it lays right out for all to see the awful conditions in some churches of Christ in Asia.

Maybe someone will put out a new revised version - kind of like the Reader's Digest Condensed Bible - that will accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative, so that brethren who are so worried about "our image" will have one to hand out.

Of course, much I have said so far has been tongue-in-cheek, to make us think. We

need to think. Are we not in some way professing ourselves to wise becoming fools? Are we professing ourselves to be wiser than the Apostles and the Holy Spirit in our tactics? Do we think they did not know that those writings - even those that put brethren in a bad light - would be for general distribution? I am afraid that we are fast developing an attitude among brethren that is more concerned with "enhancing our image" before the world and creating a more positive approach in order to attract and keep more folks to count as members than we are in really converting people to Christ. Converting people to Christ is more than creating in them a favorable opinion of brethren, it is teaching people the truth and urging them to obey it and stand for it at all cost. It is helping them understand that not all brethren are genuine and that many who profess Christ have human failings and sins, but they can and must be faithful in spite of that. It is helping them understand that their faith must stand in the Christ and not in human beings and their behavior - even if those human beings are brethren. It is helping them understand that, instead of Christianity solving all their problems in this life, that it may create some new ones for them. (cf. Luke 9:57-62; 14:25-35). They need to be made aware of all of this, then they will be less likely to be thrown into a tail spin when they encounter such in the real world of being a Christian. Tell them that by obeying the gospel and serving Christ they will be able to cope with these problems and go to heaven when they die.

Christians are primarily interested in truth. They are not afraid of truth, even unpleasant truth. If we get so afraid that our neighbors will hear us that we suppress truth and open efforts to seek and proclaim it, even unpleasant truth about ourselves, then we will become just another sect interested only in putting its best foot forward and protecting its image and recruiting its members by a positive sales psychology - rather than being a people that believe that truth is strong enough to withstand close investigation and that true Christianity can afford to be open and frank before the whole world. With this approach the early church grew stronger in spirit and numbers and purified itself. I believe that truth still has that power - if we will quit being so timid and apologetic about it. -- Editor.

"A FRIENDLY CHURCH"

Robert C. Welch

This essay is presented to provoke thought. Many churches these days announce that theirs is "A Friendly Church." It may be that at times it is done with tongue in cheek, wishing it were more nearly true. But, is this giving the true spiritual concept, or is it leaving the impression of the material or social gospel trend?

Christians should be as friendly as divine revelation and individual nature requires and permits. True friendliness should be cultivated and genuine hospitality developed. This is vastly different from a feigned love of others and putting on an act of friendliness. At times there is too much of a don't care attitude toward guests and newcomers into the church and community. Sometimes without realizing it how it appears Christians will form little groups and greet only those of that group engaging in conversation and work, leaving others of the congregation and visitors unnoticed. Observers of this situation will then consider the congregation unfriendly, when they themselves have never thought of the appearance it gives to others.

COME TO WORSHIP

On the other hand, what is our purpose in coming together? Is it to show that we are very much socially conscious? Is it to let people know that we believe in friendliness as a major feature of religion? What if this Christian is not very sociable, forward and talkative by nature? Does this prevent his being a faithful and profitable servant of the Lord? Do we assemble to worship or to be sociable? When we come together we should be sociable; but the purpose of our gathering is to worship God. Being sociable is not a peculiar characteristic of Christians. Any religious, civic, or society of people can be sociable.

Would it not be more nearly according to the divine purpose of religion and the church to emphasize in our advertizing and announcements that we are interested in people observing and engaging in true worship? You think that very few would be attracted by an announcement that we are "A

Worshipping Church"? Whether it is more attractive than "A Friendly Church" or not, it would more nearly express the true purpose of religious service.

"A Pure Church" seems never to find its way into prevalent advertizing. But is that not as important feature of the church and its members as that of friendliness? Sectarians can be just as friendly as anybody, but they do not have "a pure church." Why play up the friendliness of the church unless it is for the purpose of showing how much we are like sectarians or social clubs, rather than showing that we have something they need which they cannot find elsewhere?

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

The trend of the age is that of what is called "The Social Gospel." It is concerned with the present and pleasant human relations as opposed to the things commanded and the eternal. This have made many religious bodies emphasize the club element, the recreational affairs, and general social amenities, above that of obedience and worship and work in preparation for eternal life. Those former things have never been a peculiar part of the divine scheme.

Surrounded by that disposition, it is easy for us to lose sight of the important things, to the point of over emphasizing the minor things; to minimize the spiritual and peculiar features by over emphasizing the natural and general features. This is what has happened with emphasis on "a friendly church." - from NORTHERN KENTUCKY LIGHT.

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QUESTIONS - PREACHING

Aude McKee

Sometimes questions are asked about the preacher and his work. In this article we hope to briefly answer some of them.

1. Do preachers receive a special call from God? The answer is NO!! Making the decision to give one's life to preaching the gospel grows out of conviction that the work needs to be done. If God called all preachers in the world today, what a confused called God must be (see 1 Cor. 14:33). Do you think God calls one preacher to proclaim baptism as essential to salvation and another to deny it? Or some to preach that a child of God cannot fall from grace and another to affirm that he can?

2. What are the requirements to be a preacher? The Bible lays down no formal requirements such as so much education, special degrees, graduation from a seminary, ordination, etc. If you have heard of such being required, you can mark it down that such came from men, not from God.

However, there are certain things demanded by God in His Word. First, a preacher must be a man (1 Tim. 2:12). Second, he must be a faithful Christian (2 Tim. 2:2). Third, he must be willing to spend long hours in a study of God's Word in order to preach the truth and not error (2 Tim. 4:2). No lazy person can "do the work of an evangelist" and he certainly cannot go to heaven (2 Thess. 3:10). Fourth, he must be a person who have enough courage and conviction to speak the truth under all circumstances. He cannot be the kind of person who will compromise the truth for any reason (Gal. 1:10). And fifth, a preacher must be a person with love in his heart (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

3. What are the undesirable things about preaching? Things have changed considerably in the past few years, but still in many cases the income of a preacher is less than others. And it must be pointed out that the "side benefits" of a material nature are fewer in number. No insurance, no retirement, no seniority benefits, no union representation, etc. And when you compare preaching the gospel with secular pursuits, many times the hours are

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Bible Classes.....9:45 A. M.
Worship.....10:45 A. M.
Worship..... 6:00 P. M.

WEDNESDAY:

Bible Class.....10:00 A. M.
Bible Classes..... 7:30 P. M.

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June 10-15 - H. E. Phillips

not as good. Seven to four, Sunday off, etc., are unheard of things. And too, advancement opportunities are non-existent. You begin as a "minister" (servant) and this is the way you end your life after 40 or 50 years. You begin at a certain "pay level" and when you move you may take a considerable cut. You may be working with a comfortable meeting house and move to work with a handful meeting in a schoolhouse.

4. Are there any desirable things connected with preaching the gospel? The answer to this question is that the desirable so far outweighs the undesirable that you have to stop and make an effort to enumerate the undesirable! You move among and work with the finest people in the world. But like Paul said, "In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and earth..." In the Lord's church you will occasionally run across a brother or sister who is dishonorable but in the main a gospel preacher has the "cream of the crop" to work with. And the man who preaches the gospel can go to bed at night with the satisfaction of knowing that he is engaged in the greatest work in this world. Other occupations affect people for time, but God's Word affects them for eternity!

I wish I could encourage more young men to think about and pray about giving their lives to preaching and teaching God's word.
—WEST KNOXVILLE BULLETIN.

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