

“PREACH YE UPON THE HOUSETOPS”

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The Church Of Christ

The church of Christ is distinctive in nature. The thrust of its mission is not social reform but spiritual redemption. One characteristic that sets us apart from other religions of men is our message. We have a message to deliver from Christ. The method of delivery is preaching and teaching. Mark recorded the command of Jesus, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mk. 16:15, 16). Paul communicated the challenge to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1, 2).

Trying To Blend In

The tendency to blend in with the religions about us has yielded congregations dwindling in membership numbers. Younger Christians not grounded in the faith of Christ are going out to congregations for social contacts many times at the expense of distinctive Bible preaching and teaching. In the past it was sometimes heard that a preacher's sermon could be preached in any denominational pulpit without causing a stir. Today it may be observed that a few denominational preachers make more effort to present Bible content in their sermons than some preachers associated with the churches of Christ whose goal is to be politically correct. The preacher must please God, not man. Paul wrote, "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" (Gal. 1:10).

We Have A Message To Proclaim

We have a message to proclaim. Jesus taught His disciples to preach that message at all costs, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:23-28).

"Preach Ye Upon The Housetops"

Jesus said, "Preach ye upon the housetops." The small group strategy as advanced by the Harding Graduate School of Religion in Memphis and the Cordova Community Church violates the will of God and the plain teaching of Christ. In A Theological And Strategic Statement For A New Church Planting co-authored by Gary Ealy and John Mark Hicks, Professor at Harding Graduate School of Religion, dated October 5, 1997, the use of the denominational plan with small groups or "cell" groups is advocated. Page seven reads, "First, the church will emphasize evangelism through cell groups (a small group ministry)." Under the heading "Concrete Structure," item two, page four states, "Every member of the church is expected to participate in a cell group for evangelism, developing relationships and maturing in their faith. These groups may meet at any time during the week, but most will probably meet on Sunday evenings in various homes."

What Is A Cell Church Structure?

The "cell church structure" is explained on page three: "This is the heart of the 'cell church' structure, and it is where the intimate ministry of the church is conducted. This is a small group of 8-16 adults who gather weekly to share, pray and study the Bible. The group serves both the relational and spiritual needs of its members, and it seeks to evangelize friends and acquaintances through their group meetings. This would serve as the primary point of entrance into the body, and it would be the primary environment in which Christians would care for each other. "The church plant will begin with a set of trained core members who will lead various home cell groups. These cell groups will provide the context for and means by which new members will be assimilated and equipped for ministry."

The Wrong Emphasis

The roots of small group/cell group deriving from the volatile, destructive crossroads/Multiplying Ministry debacle of the late 1970s exceeds the limits of the present study. The present purpose for exposing the small group/cell group strategy is to show where the emphasis lies. Is it where Jesus placed it when He said, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops" (Matt. 10:27)? Unfortunately no. The pattern of so-called "growing denominations" is viewed with greater regard and respect than the great commission of Jesus Christ.

The Right Emphasis

The apostles of Christ would preach the gospel before the most prominent people in the world (Matt. 10:18; Acts 25:10, 11). Paul stated the right emphasis concerning evangelism in Romans 1:14-16: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." His emphasis was not one sided. He declared, "And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20). There was not one approach and message for the public and another for private consumption. Paul taught the same message in every church of Christ (1 Cor. 4:17).

Conclusion

Since we have a message and that message is God's power unto salvation to all mankind, it should be published, proclaimed, promulgated, and pronounced unashamedly as far and widely as ability and opportunity allow. As members of the Lord's body commissioned to preach and teach the gospel, we ought to have the disposition that it matters not to us if you just graduated from Yale or just got out of jail, you need to obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the parallel text of Luke 12:1-3 the Lord said, "In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops."