

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

History Repeats Itself – Again

By Gailen Evans

I was but a child in the fifties, but I well remember all the ruckus about the church support of human institutions. There were actually debates where the “issues” were hotly contested. Many were critical of those who took a militant stand in opposition to the support of such organizations as orphan homes, old folks homes, unwed mother homes, and colleges.

The threat of “division” was very real, and many sought a means of avoiding such a crisis at all costs. Some decided the best course of action was just don’t talk about it. Keep your “opinion” to yourself and simply get along. “Trouble makers” were branded and excluded from the “meeting circuit” and the “yellow flag of quarantine” was an effort to put an end to the “Anti” threat. If you were receiving financial support to preach the gospel, you had to be careful not to make any sounds of opposition to the support of human institutions. It could be devastating to our livelihood.

An effort was made that was intended to make it possible for brethren to just get along without division. Most recall it as the “box-in-the-vestibule.” In an article in the *Gospel Guardian*, a well-known and respected brother stated: “*When we pointed this out some weeks ago, suggesting that this might be a way to ease tension in the present fight, and to enable congregations to work together without dividing, we suggested that all of us ought to go ‘the second mile’ in showing love, tolerance, and brotherly kindness toward one another, and that, with that in mind, those of us who are conscientiously opposed to supporting the institutional homes should be willing to practice forbearance and submit to the institutional brethren’s ‘box-in-the-vestibule’ arrangement for their support of their pet projects, no matter how much we might be galled by it and how much we might dislike the idea.*” – *Gospel Guardian*, Vol. 8, No. 25, Page 4, October 25, 1956.

Of course, history has shown how well this worked. Division was inevitable, and there was no way the people who want to support human institutions would settle for a “box-in-the-vestibule.” Churches have been divided and clear lines have been drawn in the sand. While such division is deplorable, it is necessary for the purity of the church.

Consequently, many have become battle weary, and any “issue” that threatens the Body of Christ today causes them grave concern. “How can we handle more controversy?” “We don’t want to divide the church!” Perhaps history is repeating itself.

In the Lord’s church today, there are many “boxes-in-the-vestibule” designed to avoid controversy. And the results, inevitably, will be the same.

In the “brotherhood” these days there is a conscious effort to cleverly conceal what gospel preachers *really believe* on critical moral issues. Maybe this is a backlash from the realization that men we respected and held in high esteem were teaching a doctrine that was contrary to God’s will. It seems that no one wanted division on Marriage Divorce and Remarriage (MDR), so we simply decided not to discuss it. A “don’t-ask-don’t-tell” policy was put in place, and suddenly everyone is okay. For an example, a friend of mine was invited to speak in a lectureship that included a brother who preached for a congregation that was well known for its stand on MDR. My friend asked the preacher who had invited him if he knew what this other preacher believed on the subject, and he said, “I don’t know.” Now let me get this straight: You invited a man to speak on the Home and Family, and you don’t know what he believes on the subject? This is definitely a case of “don’t-ask-don’t-tell.”

The problem is that this is not an isolated case. Lectureships are being advertised all over the country which

include preachers from various places. Some of them are known to be “sound” on the “issues” and others are most definitely not. We have to wonder if the elders even took the time to determine the soundness of these men? Or, do they really care? Are the members of these congregations conducting the lectureships aware that these men teach and believe diverse doctrines?

“Oh,” someone says. “It wouldn’t be proper to grill a preacher about such sensitive issues.” Wouldn’t it? As a minister of the gospel, he has a grave responsibility (Jas. 3:1). Why would he be sensitive about what he believes? It is a confirmed fact that some have been taught to avoid telling anyone what they really believe. A preacher I know personally told me that the old preacher who tutored him and others said: “If anyone asks you what you believe on MDR, tell them you believe just what Jesus and the apostles taught — nothing more!” And do you know what? He did it and deceived people for many years.

Some have tried to minimize the danger of using men who teach doctrines contrary to God’s Word for meetings and lectureships. They assure us that they would soundly refute any false doctrine if they should teach it from the pulpit. Other than the fact that there is a clear violation of 2 John 9-11, there is a long-range danger that is lurking.

A local congregation has used brother “Glad Hand” for lectureship and pulpit exchanges for many years. There has seemingly been no effect on the soundness of the congregation. During this time, Bob and Susie were growing up among them, and they obeyed the gospel, got married, and moved to a new city. In looking for a place to worship, they realized that brother “Glad Hand” preached for a congregation nearby. They fondly remembered him from their home congregation and decided they would worship with that congregation. Things seemed to be going splendidly, and as the years went by, they were slowly being fed a doctrine that led them to believe that it was permissible to remarry after a divorce for any cause, as long as you “repent.” They never questioned the truth of this because the elders at their home congregation had used brother “Glad Hand,” which constituted their approval. Then, things got difficult between Bob and Susie. They were just not happy in their marriage. So, they divorce, repent, and remarry — with “Glad Hands” approval. Who will answer for their sin? Surely we can see how Bob and Susie would be guilty. But, what about brother “Glad Hand” who taught them that such a practice was approved by God? And, what about the elders of the congregation they grew up in? Can they be without guilt?

All of this could be avoided if the elders had done their job in the first place. But one of the sad things about this is, the members of the congregation were counting on the elders to protect them from false teachers, not exposing them to such a threat (Titus 1:7-11).

I know that we will not be judged as a congregation, but we must be responsible for what and who we are supporting. How sad indeed for the members of Bob and Susie’s home congregation when they find out they have been in clear violation of 2 John 9-11. It is our duty to question and ***“test the spirits,”*** knowing that ***“many false prophets have gone out into the world”*** (1 Jn. 4:1).

Brethren, we are reaping the harvest of this type of thinking. “Don’t preach on controversial issues, don’t discuss them, and don’t draw lines of fellowship on them.” Many years ago, I said that the issue we would be facing would no longer be MDR, but Fellowship with those who have departed from the Truth. An older preacher told me then that some were ready to draw lines of fellowship, but he was not. I will say once again what I said then: *The Line is Already Drawn!* God has drawn it. It is up to us to honor it. — ***Buenaventura Church of Christ*** Website. ■

“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 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” (Eph. 5:3-8).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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