

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The Way To Soundness

(Jerry Fite)

The popular agenda for churches today is to attract the most people. Let us become 5,000 strong as the early church in Jerusalem is the clarion call. Souls will be encouraged more in a large assembly rather than by small insignificant numbers. While reaching the most souls is commendable, the goal of God is that souls be sound and healthy, not feeling good in a crowd.

The Scriptures remind us that healthy souls are people who are sound in the faith. Being sound in the faith often demands pointed reproof. Paul highlights this truth with these words of exhortation to Titus: “. . . *For which cause reprove them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men who turn away from the truth*” (Titus 1:13-14). Reproof is more than the condemnation of certain practices, but it is the penetration with truth into the conscience of those in error. It often is not a pleasant process, for as in Paul’s inspired words, it may have to come “sharply”. The word denotes a “cutting” process. Cutting to the heart with truth is the road to soundness.

We see this process taking place throughout the New Testament. Herod’s marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife, and his other evil deeds were “reproved” by the courageous John (Luke 3:19). Christians in Ephesus were exhorted to not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. But they were to take an additional step: “. . . *but rather reprove them*” (Ephesians 5:11). Unbelievers who assembled with Christians were not ignored in the reproving way to soundness. The secrets of their heart were made manifest as they heard the reproving words of true prophets in the assembly (I Corinthians 14:24). The process would move them to reverently acknowledge that God was truly among them.

This aspect of the assembly is certainly foreign to the modern mega-church agenda. Attracting the crowds, not reproving the crowds is what a sound church should be doing these days in the mind of so-called successful church planners.

I fear such thinking has influenced the thoughts of some of our brethren. In the mind of some, big numbers manifests success. Small numbers sadly indicates irrelevance. So, publicly dealing

with controversial issues, will not be done in the assemblies. This may turn people off of Christianity. Distinctive teaching that re-proves error certainly will not attract crowds today, so we will keep our preaching in generalities and on more positive themes. Being sound in the faith is a positive theme. But God says distinctive reprove with the word is the way to soundness.

Paul exhorted Titus to deal with the religious error surrounded by Jewish fables and centered in the commandments of men. The island of Crete was home to religious liars. Men, motivated by monetary gain, were speaking their lies to attract others. Paul says, “*their mouths must be stopped*” (Titus 1:10-12). There was still hope that distinctive reproof would produce soundness in the religious teachers of error, not just the people they were adversely affecting. The seriousness of truth which transcends any modern agenda for church growth is that man’s philosophy and wisdom will capture souls for Hell (Colossians 2:8, 15). The soul needs to hear the reproof of the word in order to be sound. Such is the makeup of a sound church, regardless of the numbers that may be attracted.