

Is Book, Chapter, And Verse Preaching Outdated?

The Word of God tells us that whatever we do in word or deed must be done in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17). This means that if we are going to say it or do it, we must have a “thus saith the Lord” for it. Additionally, we learn that even our thoughts are to be governed by the Word of God (cp. Proverbs 27:3; Matthew 5:27-28; Romans 12:3). In fact, God, through His revealed Word, “has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). In other words, God’s people, through a study of His Word, can be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work, and this is why “All Scripture ... is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Consequently, if anyone speaks, he ought to speak as “the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

Our allegiance to these truths has made us the unique people we are: a people dedicated to God and His Word. We have demanded book, chapter, and verse for everything we do in all of life. Like the noble Bereans, we have “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). While others around us have floundered in a sea of subjectivity, we have stood on the bedrock of that objective standard found in God’s Word. While those about us were allowing themselves to be further secularized, we were busy being molded into a seemingly ragtag group of “strangers and pilgrims on earth” (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11-12).

But an ill wind has begun to blow within churches of Christ. Even though we correctly resisted the unscriptural schemes of our more liberal brethren, who turned their meeting houses into holy gymnasiums and “Family Life Centers,” regrettably, we still fell victim to the various secular philosophies of our age. Humanism, rationalism, pragmatism, materialism, and hedonism form the foundation of the “American Dream” that has, in turn, taken its toll on us all. Our “can-do” spirit has taken us from an on-our-knees study of God’s Word to a stand-on-our-own-two-feet, we-can-do-it-through-science-and-technology mentality. Such has moved us away from our duties to God and caused us to seek personal gratification (i.e. the satisfaction of needs) in all that we do. As a result, churches are seen by many as country clubs — “places” created solely for the purpose of satisfying our “needs.” Consequently, “worship” must be entertaining, and will certainly be seen as a failure unless it promotes our self-esteem.

Discouraged by society’s resistance to the gospel of Christ, and influenced by the previously mentioned mentality, some have begun constructing a gospel that is pleasing and acceptable to those who are “this worldly.” Therefore, the latest self-centered theories from pop psychology, sociology, and success/motivation training have been “baptized” in biblical language and passed off as gospel truth. Bowing to the totem of the self-actualized, autonomous SELF, more and more are rejecting what is being called the “sin-oriented, negative message” of the Bible and are replacing it with the “feel-good-about-yourself” gospel of self-love.

In order to become successful in such an environment, some gospel preachers have become counselors and therapists. Instead of addressing the timeless message of

God's Word to the real problems of life, these preachers have poured over their secular books and accommodated the Bible to the messages found in them. Consequently, personal charm, eloquent speech, academic credentials, and organizational ability are becoming much more important than a preacher's knowledge of God's Word. Of course, other than a preacher's general faithfulness to the Lord, there is not anything more important than his knowledge of the Word of God. But because many other qualities are more important than a preacher's knowledge of God's Word, we are losing our biblical world view, both in the pulpit and the pews. Many are no longer preaching book, chapter, and verse and many of the brethren "love to have it so" (cp. Jeremiah 5:31).

Like those of old who did not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, and because of their "itching ears," heaped to themselves false teachers, many among us are turning their ears away from the truth and are turning to fables (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The only thing that will prevent this ill wind from turning into a full-scale cyclone of apostasy is repentance and a return to the objective standard of God's Word. If we are to be the unique people our Lord created us to be, then we must demand a "thus saith the Lord" for everything we do in every facet of our lives. We must demand that the Word of God be the only standard used to "convince," "rebuke," and "exhort" us, "with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Is book, chapter, and verse preaching outdated? Among some, yes. But among God's peculiar people it is the "power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

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