

“Peripheral Issues”

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the campus of Abilene Christian University during their lectureship. Although I was aware of the college's historic endorsement of institutionalism and other avenues of digression, it did not prepare me for what I heard from two of the speakers. The university had invited Dr. Montie Cox, an associate professor and director of missions from Harding University, to speak on the topic of “Renewing Our Identity: Seeking and Saving the Lost.” I was not ready for what I heard!

He addressed the church’s pursuit of “peripheral issues.” Starting with the Restoration Movement, Dr. Cox listed several “peripheral issues” such as the missionary society, instrumental music and premillennialism. He bemoaned the notion that the church had become encumbered in these issues instead of spreading the gospel. During an open forum later that day between F. LaGard Smith and Mike Armour, Smith outlined several points that are hampering the communications between Christians. In this list he said that those who label individuals as false teachers are “demonizing” them, and that using their tapes, bulletin articles and Internet writings are doing so as a means of “entrapment.”

Needless to say, these two attitudes are troubling. To consider doctrinal matters of the Lord’s body as “peripheral issues” minimizes the impact of the scriptures and negates the church’s ability to maintain doctrinal purity (1 Timothy 4:6; Romans 16:17). However, such digression is necessary in order for the change agents to spread their error. Without the fear of discipline, false teachers may continue to spread their fables to the spiritually unstable (2 Timothy 4:3-4). In essence, some churches have traded their doctrinal purity for the glamour of the denominational world. Faithful brethren must have no fellowship with these digressions and demand accountability of those who teach error (Ephesians 5:11). Many preachers use the Bible for doctrine or instruction in righteousness, but fail to use it for reproof or correction (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Are we afraid to offend or alienate? Instead, we need to do the Lord’s bidding.

Adapted From Kelly G. Spence