

The Purpose Of Gospel Meetings

Introduction. "Why should we have gospel meetings? We are not baptizing people any more. Gospel meetings used to accomplish a lot of good when America was a rural nation and non-Christians would visit the meetings. But, now non-Christian Americans will not visit gospel meetings, so they are a leftover relic from a bygone era which are no longer effective in reaching the people. Gospel meetings need to be discarded."

Everyone who has been a Christian for any considerable length of time has heard sentiments like these. But reminding ourselves of the legitimate goals of gospel meetings and refocusing our aims on those goals should help us to have more effective gospel meetings.

The only means which God has of reaching the hearts of men is through the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21). We preach the gospel in gospel meetings for the purpose of creating, building, and strengthening faith. If we understand that preaching is the divinely ordained way to create, build, and strengthen faith, we should immediately see that less preaching will produce less faith! In recognizing the fact that we are reaching fewer people today with the gospel, we must understand that less preaching is not the proper solution to the problem.

What does a person do who wants to eat fresh fish when the fish are not biting? Does he quit fishing or fish less? A person has to fish a lot harder to catch enough fish for dinner when the fish were not biting than when they were biting. We are living in a time when the "fish" (non-Christian world) are not biting. We are, therefore, going to have to work a lot harder to find the good and honest in heart who might respond to the gospel.

I. ***To Save The Lost***

- A. No one can be saved without faith (Mark 16:15-16; John 8:24). One of the primary reasons we have gospel meetings is to win the lost.
 1. Even though we admit that fewer non-Christian visitors are attending gospel meetings than in the past, still there are non-Christians attending most gospel meetings.
 2. In nearly every gospel meeting I conduct, there are some non-Christians present and I am preaching the gospel in an effort to save them.
- B. Christians can develop an evil heart of unbelief and fall into sin (Hebrews 3:12). We preach to save the erring Christians who have developed an evil heart of unbelief. In most gospel meetings that are conducted, there are erring Christians who would freely admit that they are presently in an unsaved condition. We preach with the purpose of saving their souls and restoring them to the Lord (cf. Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

- C. Many erring Christians have been taught the truth on such subjects as institutionalism, church-sponsored recreation, instrumental music in worship, unscriptural divorce and remarriage, and other forms of sin in which they were engaged through the efforts of gospel meetings. Some have repented of their sins and been restored to God through these efforts.

II. ***To Keep The Saved***

- A. We preach in gospel meetings to strengthen all Christians. We want to hold the ones we have already won for Christ. To do so, we must keep their faith strong in the Lord. The means of doing that is to continue to teach them the word of God's grace (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2; 1 Timothy 4:6 cf. 2 Peter 1:12-13, 15).
- B. Christians have had their marriages strengthened through lessons on the family, received words of encouragement or hope, learned to pray more effectively, and otherwise been strengthened through the efforts in gospel meetings. Are the Christians in your local church so strong that they need no more strengthening (Revelation 2:5)?

III. ***Objections To Gospel Meetings***

- A. Are gospel meetings advantageous in today's world? Some brethren say gospel meetings are no longer useful. As you consider these typical criticisms of gospel meetings, see if you detect the common thread running through each one.
1. Gospel meetings are outdated and ineffective now.
 - a) This attitude leaves the impression that the gospel must be dressed up in some new way if it is to have any impact upon sinners today. This simply is not true. God's word is powerful and persuasive and able to convert the lost and strengthen the saved -- today (Psalm 19:7-11; Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).
 - b) Some suggest the only way to reach souls for Christ today is to first develop personal friendships (so-called "friendship evangelism"); gospel preaching is not enough. Certainly friends need the gospel, and a friend is more likely to talk with you about the gospel than is a complete stranger. Still, it was not friendship that persuaded about 3,000 souls on the day of Pentecost to believe and be saved. It was the power of the word of God (Acts 2:40-41).
 2. A week is too long and too tiring.
 - a) This is usually said by the Christian who has already decided he will not come to every worship service. Yes, to participate in any week-long activity requires a large amount of dedication and energy. That means we will get tired.

- b) But, is this the best we can do when it comes to gospel preaching? Can you imagine Cornelius saying to Peter, "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God" -- just make it quick (Acts 10:33)? If this had been Jesus' attitude toward His work of redeeming sinners, would He have endured the cross or said, "That's too demanding"?
- 3. Only brethren come to gospel meetings.
 - a) This is not true. The lost are saved as a result of gospel meetings. I have seen it and perhaps you have, too.
 - b) Maybe this criticism hides a more troubling picture: perhaps the lost do not come because we do not invite them and bring them to hear the gospel (John 1:46). But, what if only Christians come? That does not nullify the good that is done when saints assemble (Hebrews 10:24-25).
- 4. Meetings are just another way for preachers to make money.
 - a) This sort of motive judging is sad but true of some Christians. The gospel preacher should not be made to feel ashamed for receiving financial support for preaching the gospel, but it happens (Luke 10:7; 1 Corinthians 9:14).
 - b) Could it be that some brethren do not wish to support gospel preaching by their presence as well as not supporting it with their giving, even though God has commanded both (1 Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 10:25)?
- B. Did you discover the thread running through these objections to gospel meetings? These complaints show a lack of faith and attitudes of selfishness and excuse-making, not faith in the power of Christ and His gospel. Gospel meetings are not the only scriptural arrangement we can use to teach the lost and encourage the saved. But we ought to realize that no scriptural arrangement of spreading the gospel will succeed unless and until we diligently commit ourselves to it, including gospel meetings.

Conclusion. The fact of the matter is that too many churches have fallen into the rut of having gospel meetings from habit and custom. The church buys printed announcements which are mailed to area churches and the meetings are attended by the most spiritual ones from area congregations and many of the saints in the local church. The trouble is that sometimes a significant percentage of the local church does not care enough about the preaching of the gospel to come to the meeting (or other services than the Sunday morning worship to observe the Lord's supper). Many Christians are not inviting their friends, relatives, and neighbors to hear the gospel preached. They do not talk to those with whom they come in contact

to open up opportunities for the gospel. Then when no one comes to the meeting, they say, "Gospel meetings are not doing any good any more." What we need to be saying is this: "We have quit working to reach our friends and neighbors with the gospel. Many of us are too preoccupied with the cares of this world to even come to the meeting ourselves, much less bring someone with us. We need to repent of our sinful negligence and apathy and give ourselves totally to the Lord's work."

When this happens, brethren will be greatly surprised at how much good can be done in gospel meetings. We should examine our commitment to gospel preaching as our meeting approaches. Use your opportunity to hear the gospel and to help others hear it, too. Invite your friends, family, and strangers. Invite your brethren in Christ. Plan to be present, to grow in faithfulness, and in service. Trust the power God's word has on the lives of good and honest hearts (Luke 8:15). God's word will accomplish His purposes (Isaiah 55:11). Good can and will be done through gospel meetings.