

The Brown Street Beacon

"...Shine out among them like beacon lights,

holding out to them the Word of Life" (Phil 2:15-16)



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How Long Do You Preach?

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There are very few subjects over which preachers receive more criticism than the length of their sermons. Ezra read the Book of the Law to the people "from morning until midday" (**Neh. 8:3**), and while at Troas the apostle Paul preached a sermon and "continued his message until midnight" (**Acts 20:7**). However, the vast majority of sermons recorded in the Bible could easily be preached in under ten minutes.

When people ask me how long I preach, I usually respond, "Until I get done." I am not trying to be flip about the subject, but the length of a sermon depends upon the topic. I don't know how one could do justice to the story of the crucifixion of Christ in a 20 minute sermonette.

I've heard older preachers harshly criticize younger men for not preaching long enough. Sometimes this criticism is just -- other times it is simply an attempt by a long-winded preacher to justify himself.

Preachers usually don't like to admit it, but long sermons are often the result of poor sermon preparation. When preachers fail to do adequate sermon preparation you are apt to here a lot of tired stories about their youth, some worn out attempts at humor and very little Scripture.

During our years in Zion, I have prepared printed sermon outlines which are passed out to the audience before every sermon. Brethren sometimes joke about the length of the outline -- a four page outline usually means a short sermon. The reason is that a longer outline is the result of a great deal of preparation in which words can be chosen with more care, and extraneous material can be omitted. When the outlines are passed out and the brethren see less than a full page of notes, some of them wonder if they are going to have to cancel their dinner plans!

Another factor to consider is the speed at which a preacher speaks. I know of several preachers who could cut the length of their sermon in half if they would simply speed up their rate of speaking -- as an added bonus their audience might even be able to stay awake during the sermon!

I am reminded of the man who went to the dentist to have a tooth removed. The patient inquired as to the cost for removing a tooth and the dentist told him it would be \$90. The man told the dentist it seemed like a lot of money for a few seconds work. The dentist told his patient, "Well, if it would make you feel better, I can pull the tooth out real slow!" I feel the same way about sermons -- if you think I preach too short of a lesson, I could just slow down my rate of speaking.

Many years ago brother Roy Cogdill debated D. N. Jackson, the great Baptist preacher. When the debate was transcribed and put into book form, brother Cogdill had to explain in the introduction that

while both speakers had the same amount of time allotted in their speeches, in the book Cogdill's speeches took up twice as many pages -- the reason was Cogdill spoke rather quickly, while Jackson was about as slow as molasses.

The length of a sermon is not nearly as important as the content. Those who truly love the Lord will be willing to listen to the Word of God proclaimed regardless of how long it takes.

“Tips For Finding A Church”

By Heath Rogers

The Victoria Advocate recently published a magazine called “Discover Victoria and the Crossroads Area.” On page 40 was a short article titled “Four Tips On Choosing A Church” written by Erica Rodriguez. The article begins: “With nearly 100 houses of worship in the Victoria area, choosing the place that’s the right fit can be difficult without first taking a few thoughts into consideration. Several Victoria religious leaders offered these tips to successfully finding a church to meet your needs.” I want to look at two of these tips in light of the teachings of the Bible.

Find A Church That Preaches Your Doctrine

The article stated, “Perhaps the most important concept of choosing a church is finding one that lines up with your Biblical beliefs.” It is true that different churches teach different doctrines. It would be difficult for a sincere individual to remain comfortable in a church that taught things that he did not believe to be true. Considering the state of religion today, this seems like good advice, but it was the wording of the suggestion that got my attention. It said that one should find a church that “preaches your doctrine” and that “lines up with your Biblical beliefs.” I couldn’t help but think of Paul’s warning to Timothy. *“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables”* (II Tim. 4:2-4, emphasis mine - HR).

Instead of finding a church that caters to our own beliefs, shouldn’t we be searching for a church that preaches the word of God? The church in the Bible continued steadfastly in the “*apostles’ doctrine*,” not the disciples’ doctrine (Acts 2:42).

Be Confident God Wants You There

This appears to be a commendable idea. After all, we certainly would not want to be anywhere that God did not want us to be, but how are we going to know if God wants us to be at a particular church? The advice given in the article is that people should make sure that they “feel called” to a particular church. I can understand why this suggestion would be made, for I hear many religious people talk about how they feel that God has called them to different places or they feel that God has led them to make important decisions.

The problem with making important decisions with our feelings is that our feelings are based upon ourselves – not upon God or His word. The Bible warns us against trusting our feelings, opinions, judgments, etc. *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Prov. 14:12, c.f. Jer. 10:23). God calls us through His gospel (II Thess. 2:13-14), not through our feelings.

The advice given by these local religious leaders is more evidence that modern day denominationalism is a man-centered religion, not a Christ-centered religion. In our market-driven society, prospective businesses have to compete for their customers. Churches of men are doing the same thing. People with little desire to become religious, and even less knowledge of the Bible, are attracted with this approach. They put a great amount of emphasis upon what they want and feel, and very little importance upon what the Bible actually says.

Are you tired of the man-centered, market-driven, opinion-based churches that abound today? Would you like to find a church that worships God in spirit and in truth, and that preaches the pure doctrine of Christ? Welcome to the Southside church of Christ!