

The Clarity Trumpet

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For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

I Corinthians 14:8, 9

Key Issues of the Day, Part 2

In discussing “key issues facing Bible believing churches today” I mentioned in the last *Clarity Trumpet* that the five issues I was going to discuss were *crucial*, and I defined crucial as those “areas in which churches are struggling and over which they are sometimes battling.” Crucial in this context does not necessarily mean *the most important* but rather areas in which the battles seem to be raging at the present, or areas in which pastors and church leaders across the country are having the most questions, or over which they are experiencing the most difficulties. Keep this in mind as I conclude with the final two areas of concern.

The third issue is --

What Constitutes True Worship?

A lot is happening within local church settings due to influences inside and outside of the various media -- some good and some not so good. It is unsettling for some, even divisive.

Questions abound. Are services more conducive to worship when words to songs are displayed on an overhead screen rather than having the people’s noses stuck in hymnals? What about the old hymns being crowded out by the newer choruses? Is that good or bad? And whatever happened to song leaders? Now we have worship leaders and coordinators. And, of all things, drums being played in the morning worship services! What’s the church coming to, anyway?

It might help to remember the old adage, KISS: (*Keep It Simple, Sweetie!*) Get it clear in your mind what constitutes true worship and you are not likely to get swept away with every new fad that comes down the

pike, nor will you be reactionary against everything that is new or different.

Here’s some helpful Scriptural insight.

First, *worship, revere, and honor* are all words which spring from the same Greek thought in your New Testament. One word, meaning to prostrate oneself in an act of worship, is used in John 4 where Jesus replied to the Samaritan woman, saying, *But the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth* (vss. 23, 24).

The other Greek word would have to do with having a proper attitude of reverence toward someone, fixing an evaluation upon that one. It is in this vein that Christ told His adversaries, *For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor (revere) the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him* (John 5:22, 23).

So, true worship would be to prostrate yourself (whether physically or in your mind) before the Lord “in spirit and in truth” and to reverence the Son in the same way as you do the Father.

However, there is another aspect of worship that we have somehow overlooked in our preoccupation with “setting the mood” for worship. The truth of which I speak is this: We often associate our worship with our *love* for the Lord, and rightly so. We sing, “I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You. Oh, my soul, rejoice.” But are you fully aware that if you look upon worship as the outward or inward expression of your love for the Lord that you may be missing the main point of New Testament worship? To put it plainly: **OBEDIENCE TO GOD IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF WORSHIP!**

Jesus made this so clear in His Upper Room Discourse (John 13-16). Each of us needs to take His words on this subject to heart: *He who has My commandments and keeps (obeys) them, it is he who loves Me. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; . . . He who does not love Me does not keep My words; . . . If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. . . . You are My friends if you do whatever I command you* (14:21, 23, 24; 15:10, 14).

It’s possible to get caught up in a religious frenzy of singing, praying, and of respectable church work and still fail to worship our God. True obedience involves a *heart attitude of submissiveness* to the Lord, of prostrating ourselves before Him, of revering Him for all that He is. Since I am convinced that Jesus Christ is

God, I bow before Him in humility and surrender, ready to obey whatever the cost. Thus, I worship Him in the fullest and truest sense.

If we keep these simple truths clearly before us we will maintain our worship *services* in keeping with the Bible's emphasis of having all of our *focus upon Him* rather than upon the ones leading us, whether pastors, worship leaders, musicians, soloists, or choirs.

Finally, there is the resurgence of an --

Ecumenical Spirit

The theologically liberal ecumenical movement has not been able to adequately do what it set out to accomplish; that is, bring all of Christendom under one religious umbrella -- a visible unity. Its greatest obstacles have been Bible believing churches. Those who take the Bible as God's final Word on all matters, especially concerning matters of faith and practice (doctrine and behavior), have refused to bow to liberalism's faulty doctrine of the "Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man." And rightly so.

However, Satan is never at a loss in adapting his methods to meet the present need as he sees it. So, along came the charismatic movement with its avowed loyalty to the Bible and its roots deeply planted in traditional pentecostalism. While traditional pentecostalism was and is very narrow in scope, the charismatic movement is very broad in its influence and in its willingness to embrace all who "name the name of Jesus" and who have received (or who *want* to receive) the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The powerful influence of the charismatic movement is seen in that it can boast of having within its fellowship not only those from pentecostal-leaning groups, but also many from mainline Protestant churches, a number of Roman Catholics, and many, many evangelicals who are "looking for something more." Yet, despite its impact, all of Christianity has not rallied around the one banner of the Holy Spirit's baptism, as defined by charismatics.

Please read the following very carefully and do not misconstrue my meaning or intent. The most recent ecumenical-type movement to come along is The Promise Keepers (founded by charismatic leaders). Officially there are seven promises of a Promise Keeper and it's hard to fault the overall emphasis. And, besides, why would anyone want to? An awfully lot of good has come as a result of men returning to their homes, businesses, communities, and churches as godly men focusing on being all they were intended to be by their Creator.

However, a growing number of pastors think there is a real potential danger here, and this danger seems to center on the emphasis contained in part of the sixth promise: *A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of biblical unity.* Some pastors are finding that there is such a steady emphasis of love over doctrine (called "denominational distinctives") that a harsh reaction toward a pastor's strong Bible teaching sometimes surfaces from men who have bought into the primacy of love over sound doctrine.

What's a pastor to do? Should he forbid men of his church from attending any ecumenical type gatherings? Would it be proper to preach a message against such movements or organizations? Should he just ignore it altogether? It doesn't seem any of these reactions would be very plausible.

There is one approach, however, that is appropriate in *all* situations: faithfully teach *Bible* truth and principles which would throw light on any situation, providing on the one hand, warning signals where needed, and on the other hand, emphasizing whatever is positive. Then when believers are exposed to any doctrine, movement, or emphasis, they will be equipped to discern truth from error, right from wrong, and will mature through the process described so well in Hebrews 5:13 and 14: *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

One final word: Proverbs 23:7 states that as a man "*thinks in his heart, so is he.*" Jeremiah reveals that "*the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*" (17:9). We're not going to find solutions to our problems or find satisfying and lasting answers to our deepest questions by looking within. We must look outside ourselves to the Word of God and allow it to so saturate us that we think God's thoughts after Him. Romans 8:5 tells us that believers live either *according to the flesh* or *according to the Spirit depending on* what they "set their minds" on. Psalm 119:11 states, *Your Word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.* Bible truth which is allowed to change and control our *thinking*, will change our *behavior*. It doesn't work any other way. There are no short cuts, no instant "spiritual maturity" pills. Bible doctrine which is known, believed, and applied will result in a Christlike life. ∞