

OFFERING THE INVITATION

After his sermon on the day of Pentecost, which concluded with the plan of salvation, Peter used “many other words” of exhortation, including the persuasive plea, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” About three thousand souls responded in obedience (Acts 2:38–41). The Gospel invitation is not as specifically described in other New Testament records of conversion as it is here, but can any doubt that those zealous preachers exhorted, persuaded, and invited men to respond in Gospel obedience after they preached to them? Consider Paul’s impassioned plea to Herod Agrippa (Acts 26:27–28).

In spite of both Scriptural example and practical considerations, a move has been underfoot by brethren in some circles for several years to dispense with an invitation to obedience at the close of Gospel sermons. I well remember the pressure put on me to stop extending an invitation at the close of my sermons in a large West Texas congregation soon after beginning work there in 1971. The basis of this insistence was that it was only a “human tradition.” That church (as I soon discovered) was (and still is) set on overturning every long-standing practice, even if it is in God’s Word. (I insisted that I would offer the invitation each time I preached, which I did—through my entire tenure of seven months there.)

Some preaching brethren have now “outgrown” offering any invitation at all. This is just as well in some cases, I suppose. Some of the “sermons” being “preached” have little in them to produce any conviction of sins that might provoke a public response. Many who still offer an invitation pattern it more after Billy Graham than Simon Peter (e.g., “Come and accept Christ as your personal Savior” or “If you need to respond,

please come forward”). If the sermon had nothing to do with the plan of salvation (likely the case with such preachers), with such a general invitation, how is a sinner to know (1) he needs to respond and (2) what response he should make?

I never assume that everyone in an assembly I address is (1) a Christian, (2) a faithful Christian, or (3) is aware of how to be saved. Since not every sermon can be on the plan of salvation, I have made it my practice through the years to conclude my sermons with an invitation, in which I attempt to emphasize (1) the urgency of being at peace with God through the blood of Christ, (2) what the Lord requires of men for such peace, and (3) the urgency of responding immediately. I plan to persevere in this practice.

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