

Preaching to Needs

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The ideal sermon deals with the needs of those in the pew. The unending quest of those who preach must be to find the real needs of people and meet them with inspired truth. However, one does not preach very long until he is stuck with the fact that what people **need** and what they **desire** are often far apart. This is not a new phenomenon. In 700 B. C., Israel needed to hear the Law of the Lord, but **desired** something else. They told Isaiah:

Prophesy not unto right things, **speak unto us smooth things**, prophecy deceit, get you out of the way..." (Isa. 30:11).

By the time of Jeremiah, circumstances had grown worse. The priests and prophets had begun to cater to the **desires** rather than to the **needs** of the people. The prophet laments:

A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land: prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30-31).

Paul predicts that such a time could come in the church:

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth... (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

It is human nature to seek approbation rather than admonition. If I had been given the choice as a boy, I would have taken orange juice instead of castor oil. When I preached on immodest clothing, social drinking, etc., many years ago, one of the deacons where I lived became very upset withholding his contribution for several weeks. He didn't **desire** such preaching, but he and his wife surely **needed** it. Another church where I worked had a portion of the eldership and the church to fall under the influence of doctrinal and moral liberalism. The critical **need** of the church was clear doctrinal preaching, but regrettably they would not have it so. The adulterer does not relish sermons on adultery, but they must be preached because they are needed.

When you hear a sermon do not judge it on whether you "liked" it, but rather whether you needed it. But even if you didn't, someone else probably did.

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