

Should Preaching Raise or Answer Questions?

Dub McClish

Certainly, I believe that preachers should aim at answering questions in the minds of the listeners. Preachers should strive to stay in touch with the questions people have on their hearts as they come into the assembly and should seek to provide answers to these questions from the Word of God. However, this assumes that people will always have pertinent questions to ask. Experience shows this to be an invalid assumption. For preachers to tune all their sermons only to listeners' questions would be to fail them. I opine that many, both within and without, do not know enough or care enough to ask the right questions – the important questions.

Scripture provides an example. When the people gathered on Pentecost, their original question was not “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), but “How hear we, every man in our own language?” and “What meaneth this?” (Acts 2:8, 12). While it is true that Peter answers both of their questions, it is significant that the sermon he preached provoked the crucial question. Before Peter's sermon, it had not entered the minds of these people to inquire about salvation. After hearing the sermon, they learned what question to ask; they asked it, and Peter answered it. Thus, it is the preacher's task to take the religious “curiosity seeker” and provoke in him the basic and important questions, and then answer them.

While it is necessary that we try to elicit the proper questions in the minds of others, this is vastly different from the practice of merely raising questions. Some of the preaching and writing that is being done seems to count it a mark of superior intelligence to raise questions that cause doubts in those who hear and that seem to advertise their own unstable convictions. Such a practice is utterly deplorable to true Gospel preachers. Surely, it is obvious that any fool can raise questions. Wisdom and truth reside in those who can provide some answers.

My task, then, as I see it, is both to provoke the right questions and provide the right answers. It is not necessarily my obligation to answer only the questions people are asking. In many cases, this would be time wasted.

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