

Is the Bible For Us Today?

Recently I found myself on the websites of two congregations that claim to be churches of Christ. One of them was announcing its "Easter week" schedule, a schedule that included participation with a denomination in a Jewish feast. The other was announcing its change in worship, a change that included practices that certainly would be popular with the masses but are nonetheless foreign to the New Testament pattern. These two are not the first to go beyond the pages of the New Testament and they probably won't be the last. What's interesting is the fact that they, like others of their ilk, in support of their practices will use the worn out phrase, "We're not changing the message, just the method." They would have us believe that they're still preaching the old Jerusalem Gospel, just in a way that is more pleasing and acceptable to our society. "Society has changed and we must change with it," they declare as they seek to defend their compromises. Let's consider for a moment how much society has "changed" since, say, the first century when the Gospel was introduced.

The world has become more accessible since that time as we now have ease of international travel for physically going from place to place and the world wide web for virtually going around the world. When Jesus walked the earth in the flesh, it appears that He confined His travels to about a 100 mile radius around the city of Jerusalem. While the apostle Paul traveled extensively, it nonetheless took him several months to go from Jerusalem to Rome (Acts 27 and 28). Yes, we get around more than did the citizens of the first century, but how does that affect the message we preach? We utilize the rapid modes of travel and the web to spread the Gospel but how does that in any way change the basic need of mankind, namely, salvation? (Romans 3:23). Can we not deliver the same Gospel they did in the first century? Better to ask, MUST we not deliver the same Gospel they did in the first century? How does our society's access to world-wide travel and world-wide information demand change in the message?

Since the first century, it would seem our society has become faster paced. We've become accustomed to meals that can be prepared literally in a flash of the microwave. We expect immediate answers to questions via the internet. We zip through the checkout lane at the store with quick scans of our products. Instant gratification has become the standard. We want what we want now. Does this make our society significantly different than first century society? The Holy Spirit used the words "patient" and "patience" over 40 times when He inspired His writers to pen the New Testament. He included it in the list of Christian graces found in II Peter 1:5-7. It appears that even first century people got ahead of themselves from time to time. They wanted God to get things done to their satisfaction within their time frames (James 5:11-12). So they had trouble with learning patience just like we do. Would that same Gospel preached then not be equally applicable to us today? What is so significantly different between our societies that would demand that we change the message of the New Testament?

Today's society is occupied with worldly matters. Even Christians get so caught up in the world that they neglect prayer, Bible study and assembling with the saints to worship. There are many distractions. Apparently those who want to change God's order want to wrap the Gospel in clothing that looks like these distractions so they can get people's attention. That way they can sneak the Gospel in on folks, making them think they're engaging in worldly pleasure while in fact they're being fed God's Word. But distractions are nothing new. In the first century, the apostle Paul wrote, "Study (give diligence, ASV) to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Timothy 2:15). Why would first century Christians need to be exhorted to give diligence to devote themselves to God? Why indeed. The answer is because they too had the distractions of the world all around them, any one of which could pull them away from the Lord. Add to this the exhortations to pray (I Thessalonians 5:17) and assemble with the saints (Hebrews 10:25) and it's clear that even in the first century people had to be reminded to seek God first. Some of them loved money (Luke 12:13ff; I Timothy 6:10). Some of them would not put the Lord ahead of their worldly pursuits (Mark 10:17ff; II Timothy 4:10). Were they really that much different than us? Are we so different from the original hearers of the Gospel that we should change the message?

Here's the bottom line to this matter. Since the fall of Adam and Eve, man's problem has been sin. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the cure for that problem. Regardless of the apparent "advances" society makes or the presumed "changes" it undergoes over time, the message of the Gospel will not change and must not be altered in its presentation. Rather than changing the message to appeal to mankind, we must change mankind by preaching the message, namely, God's pure and holy Word.