

WHAT DO WE NOW BELIEVE?

Sermon by Gordon Ferguson - Phoenix, Arizona

February 29, 2004

INTRODUCTION:

1. Begin with ACU Lectureships report (available as a separate article– please read it before continuing).
2. Title of the sermon—but let me be quick to say that it is a title of humor.
3. Turn to text, and you will know why I say that. (Read Acts 17:11)
4. All I can do is say what I believe and why, and you will have to take it from there.
5. I will add that the ministry staff is pretty much in agreement with what I will be saying, for we have discussed most of these things together.
6. However, I only speak officially for myself, but hope that when you search out these things for yourselves, you will land at about the same place, based on the Scriptures used.
7. We have done many right things in many wrong ways, as I have said repeatedly, but we cannot stop doing the right things.
8. What we need to understand today are the wrong ways, the right biblical principles, and some recommendations about how to apply these principles to the practices of the church.

BODY:

I. What About Our Preaching and Teaching?

- A. It has been too much about the movement and man's accomplishments and even responsibilities and it must be more about God and what he has done. (One ACU panelist from the mainline church commented that both groups had substituted the message of the movement for the message of Christ. I agree in both cases.)
- B. Thus, we must have more of a God focus and a Bible focus, delivered with more of an expository approach.
- C. However, we still need to be challenged, not just made to feel good no matter what.
- D. Strong teaching and preaching was a large part of what attracted me to the movement in the first place.
 1. 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:11-13; 6:17-19; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:15.
 2. (The preacher's goal: Comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable!)
- E. Ways to teach more Bible: Bible classes (Sunday school); teaching days; teacher training; voluntary classes, non-staff leadership training.

II. What About the Need For Leaders and Leadership?

- A. In our history, our approach to leaders has been suspect on some points.
 1. What another panelist from the mainline church said in Abilene about young leaders having such a huge desire to lead and to give direction to everyone around (including other leaders).
 2. My explanation about the need for many leaders with fast growing ministries, but my agreement with him about misplaced motives and worldly ambitions

being too much in the leadership picture.

3. Leadership gifts are from God, but so are all other spiritual gifts, and none is more important than the other. (No second class citizens in God's family, we are all sinners on level ground at the foot of the cross!)
- B. We still need leadership, and strong leadership at that.
 1. The passages we read under point I. above make that clear.
 2. What strong leadership means and doesn't mean.
 3. Hebrews 13:7, 17 (explain what verse 17 is saying about "being persuaded," which places responsibility on both leaders persuading and followers wanting to be persuaded by them).
- C. However, leadership must be Golden Rule type leadership.
 1. Such leadership is *servant* leadership, not "boss man" leadership.
 2. It is also team leadership, input and inclusion vital at many levels. (We have just talked about those things in our midweek services.)

III. What About Commitment?

- A. Heard us called the "Total Commitment Movement" because of our emphasis (Matthew 6:33 and how this passage was sometimes handled wrongly and *stupidly*!).
- B. Yet, we have gone to another extreme in far too many cases.
 1. What an ACU mainline panelist said about being totally *captured*, versus being totally *committed*. (God is more the focus in the former, and man is more the focus in the latter.)
 2. Yet, Luke 14:25-33 is still in the Bible. (Read it.)
- C. Concept of freedom is one of our most misunderstood concepts.
 1. I remember a sermon title in the mainline church years ago: "Freed To Be Bound." (Freed from sin to be under the lordship of Christ)
 2. NT teaching has to be taken as a whole, certainly we are free, but what else helps us define what that means?
 - a. Luke 9:23; self denial.
 - b. Matthew 20:25-28; servants of God and others.
 3. How I feel when I "veg out" and get into self indulgence! (Like a blob!)
- D. How committed are you to your family? To God's family? (It is now very difficult to get people to serve in children's ministry and many other areas.)
- E. My experiences and concerns. In the last mainline church I preached for, a general lack of commitment in the membership produced two heartbreaking results:
 1. New converts were totally turned off by the difference in what they read in the Bible and in what they saw practiced in the church by "pickers and choosers", those who attended only the church activities that were most convenient.
 2. Few of the children remained faithful to the church as adults, for they saw the hypocrisy in their parents' lives.

IV. What About Discipling?

- A. Wrong of the old:
 1. Primarily, an over/under authoritarian approach, with the discipler almost "God

- inspired" to give the right advice in about any area (what a mess!).
2. Some say the "assigning" of discipleship partners was also wrong, with no regard to anyone's feelings or opportunity for input.
 - a. They wondered if they were really a friend or just an assignment.
 - b. However, two ways to look at this one, seeing it as opportunity to make another spiritual close friend was a positive way.
 - B. Solutions; need to put the "one another," "each other" principles into practice.
 1. Read these verses: Romans 5:14; Ephesians 5:21; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 3:12-13; Hebrews 10:24; James 5:16 (present tense of the verb; hence, be in the habit of confessing your sins rather than waiting until you are sick and meeting with the elders).
 2. Have you ever seen these verses being obeyed outside our movement? (I certainly haven't.)
 3. Me and the "missing ingredient" idea, tracing back to Nelson's book, the idea of confessing sin at the temptation level and the tragedy in my relative's family when unchecked temptation led to devastating sin.
 4. What has happened to us in the last year without involvement in one another's lives; not a pretty picture, to say the least.
 5. My advice early last year; seek out discipling personally, in spite of a lack of structure; take responsibility for helping others when you see things in their lives that need attention.
 6. Certainly group discipling is a natural approach in our small ministry groups, and pairing off with others in those groups as voluntary prayer partners for a specified period of time is another good approach.
 7. Mentoring is appropriate with new Christians and in training younger ministry staff, with these relationships having the feel of "more mature/less mature" friends instead of "over/under" authoritarianism.
 8. Needs and advice, guidelines on things like "dating." (Continuing explanations of the biblical principles behind the guidelines helps keep them from becoming "rules" or "laws.")

V. What About Evangelism?

- A. Wrong of the past:
 1. A "prove it" mode; pressure and wrong type of accountability; statistics used wrongly (remember "good, great, awesome?").
 2. The real problem was one of motivation; doing a very right thing for wrong reasons.
- B. Needed is a heart for people, God's attitudes and motivation by his grace for his glory.
 1. What Jesus was all about; Great Commission in Matthew 28.
 2. Process driven, versus results driven (outreach to persons, not number keeping); lifestyle focus (with inspirational updates, reports); sharing your faith, versus inviting people to church or church activities.
 3. Me at Bryan's bedside when he was a baby, and my prayers for my influence on where he would spend eternity.
 4. What one former student shared with me at ACU about that story and its

continuing impact on him in evangelism.

5. What another shared with me also, after attending an evangelism workshop that I conducted in a mainline church years ago, he baptized eight of his high school friends within a year.
6. Theresa baking cookies and going around to meet our neighbors; no guilt motivation and no accountability motivation. (Just love for the lost!)

VI. What About Our Study Series?

- A. Our study series has flaws.
 1. Some things need to be changed in the kingdom study, the discipleship study, and the church study.
 2. Also, more of a grace-focused, cross-focused, Jesus-focused approach is very needed.
- B. However, there are definite advantages of having a specific study series.
 1. Gives us a track to get on that we have confidence in.
 2. Insures that those being studied with are taught the basics in a systematic way.
- C. Solutions: develop a new basic series, with extra studies available; teach how to make these decisions and how to have less of a structured, "cookie cutter" approach.

VII. What About Missions?

- A. The good of the "Six Year Plan"; churches were planted all over the world and thousands of souls were saved.
- B. The bad of it:
 1. Stretched us as a movement almost to the breaking point in many places (Boston experience with 53 plantings).
 2. Sent out leaders who were unprepared, which hurt them, the ones they led and the mission they had in the first place.
- C. The state of our missions churches and what their needs are today. (They are our "babies" and we cannot let them die.)
- D. What happens when a movement loses its mission focus, my experience in the mainline church.
 1. From 800 mission units (a couple if married, or a single if not) in 1975 outside the US to less than 200 in 1990, according to one publication.
 2. The self-focus on home churches led to decline, not growth.
- E. We must discover ways to cooperate with other larger churches in helping out the mission churches without having the organizational setup we had in the past.
- F. Certainly we have the need to share exact details of what the money is being spent for. (We have strong feelings from the past about this point, for sure).

VIII. What About Financial Giving and Tithing?

- A. What went wrong with dictated tithing and other giving. (We bound what God did not.)
- B. What the Bible says about tithing.
 1. Tithing traces back to Abraham's day (Genesis 14:20), about 500 years before the Mosaic law demanded tithing.

2. Why it makes sense to me as a matter of dedicating our "firstfruits" to God.
 - a. Though I don't think it is biblically binding, I think it is the better part of spiritual wisdom.
 - b. I have done it for years, and will continue to do so.
 - c. I believe that I will do better with 90% and God's blessing than with 100% hoarded selfishly!
3. See the important principles in Matthew 6:21, 24.
- C. NT emphasis about giving was on giving to meet specific needs of the poor, and on supporting people in the ministry.
 1. 2 Corinthians 8 & 9. (These chapters are about giving to meet the needs of the poor.)
 2. 1 Corinthians 9:1-14 (Here Paul argued that the minister had the right to be supported, but he forfeited this right with them due to their spiritual immaturity. He did receive support from the church in Philippi, Philippians 4:14-19).
 3. 1 Timothy 5:17-18 (Some elders can receive church support.)
- D. Attitudes needed and approach needed; appeals but not coercion; explanations but not demands.
- E. Our situation here and the \$25,000 weekly need to avoid further cuts in staff and meeting facilities.
 1. The explanations have been given already, so we will simply report the contribution numbers to you and allow your giving to determine the decisions made.
 2. I don't want to talk about it further at the present time, but appeal to you not to allow cuts to be made that will hurt us all.
 3. As I have stated, I believe our problem to be a short-term one as God continues to lead people to the church here, but it is a problem nonetheless that we need to take seriously.

IX. What About the ICOC and Our Unity?

- A. Are we still a part of the ICOC?
 1. Not organizationally, which has its pluses and minuses. (The minuses would include limitations in procuring certain types of insurance at reasonable prices.)
 2. However, surely we still want to be united with sister churches.
- B. What has been done along these lines and what things are now in discussion.
 1. Dallas meeting last fall and the Chicago unity meeting being planned.
 2. It must be clearly stated that such meetings are designed only to promote unity, not make decisions for any church or group of churches.
- C. Mainline church relationships; refer to the ACU and the Forum report.

X. What About Our Exclusivist Attitudes As A Church?

- A. Here talking about how we view other churches? Are we too narrow?
- B. Mistakes we have made in being exclusivist and self-righteous.
- C. However, two extremes to avoid on the judgmental approach, we can draw lines where God has not if we are too narrow, and we can erase lines he has drawn if we are too broad.
- D. Solution:

1. Continue to teach Bible as we now see it, while continuing to study with open mind, but allow God to judge us all.
2. Dialogue with others, as at ACU, is a very good thing.
3. Having a heart for unity with everyone can never be wrong, as long as we approach unity with Bible in hand.

CONCLUSION:

1. Even this list of ten things is not an exhaustive list of what could be discussed, but it does reflect some of the main things that made us who we were in the past.
2. I have cried out for change within our movement in the past, and will continue to call for repentance and change in all of us.
3. I cannot live any longer with doing right things in wrong ways.
4. Neither can I live with our becoming a traditional, lukewarm fellowship. (Been there-done that, never again!)
5. I have shared what I believe and why. What do you believe about these matters and what can you live with? Those are the questions with which you must wrestle. May God lead us all to the right place as we study and pray about these matters!