

Emotional Appeal and Preaching the Gospel

One of the things I have noted over the last several years is the increasing trend among fundamental Baptists toward an emotion-laden presentation of the Gospel. This comes in the form of plays or dramas, puppet shows for children, and movies about Christ. All of these are emotional appeals that seem to move otherwise unmovable individuals to salvation in Christ. However, this method and its fruit need to be seriously examined in light of the only standard that exists for judging any and all our actions and methods of presenting the Gospel:

The Scriptures.

While there are many who argue that Scripture does not restrict us from presenting the Gospel in whatsoever manner that we deem effective, their claims must be checked against the Scripture to determine the actual validity of their statements. Now, on its face the claim may appear to be true: but if we take a deeper look at what the Scriptures actually state, and the principles contained in those Scriptures, a different picture does emerge: one that is not so approving of the use of emotion in presenting the Gospel.

The most emotional appeal we have in Scripture concerning the Gospel comes from the rich man in Hell. It is plain that this man does not like being where he is, and does not want any of his family to come there. The essential portion of the account, as applicable to this article, follows:

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay,

father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.(Luke 16: 27-31)

It is the last statement made by Abraham in response to the (former) rich man's plea to send Lazarus back from the dead that is telling. Abraham would not even entertain the idea of sending Lazarus back from the dead to testify of the Gospel. Instead, Abraham states: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." This response is recorded for all who read to understand that, as powerful a witness it is for one to rise from the dead, it does not impact the heart the way the Scriptures do. In fact, every indication is that the emotional impact of such an event may not do anything but further harden the heart against the Gospel. At a very minimum, if someone has such an experience, they may become "inoculated" against the Gospel as they substitute the emotional experience for actually believing Christ in faith and repentance.

However, since there are those who protest this conclusion, and those who cannot understand why Abraham would set forth such a restriction on the presenting of the Gospel (after all, it certainly appears that Abraham is stating that the Scriptures and the plain preaching of the Scriptures are the only approved means of presenting the Gospel), it is necessary to apply the rest of the Scriptures that address this issue.

If we begin in the Old Testament, we find that the LORD made it very plain whose word the Scripture is, and to what purpose it exists. Specifically, in Isaiah, chapter 55, the LORD is clear and express about His salvation and the role His word performs in the salvation of a soul:

Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the

LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.(*Isaiah 55:6-11*)

This statement is reinforced in the New Testament in Hebrews, chapter 4, verse 12 where it speaks of the word of God as well:

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (*Hebrews 4:12*)

Moreover, in I Corinthians, chapter 1, the following statement is given by the apostle Paul under inspiration of the Holy Ghost:

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.(*I Corinthians 1:17-21*)

Notice what is stated above: that “it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching . . .” and that to those who will perish, the preaching of the cross, and preaching as a method and means of convincing people, is foolishness. This implies much about the current generation of ‘Christians’ who think that plain, old-fashioned preaching is not capable of moving people to accept Christ as their Saviour. It is quite clear that the vast majority of ‘Christendom’ does not believe that the plainly spoken and preached word of God is sufficient for much of anything at all. Rather, they believe that it takes plays, music, movies and rank entertainment to cause people to come to Christ.

Clearly, by the aforementioned Scriptures, those things are the means and methods of the world, and have nothing of God in them. Instead, they are the product of man’s reasoning and man’s methods, which are foolishness to God. These methods address the emotions, and move the emotions of man, but do nothing to the heart. It takes the Scripture, the word of God to penetrate the heart and lay bare the wickedness that lies within. The proof of this is manifest when you approach someone who has seen the plays and movies about Christ, and you begin to preach the Gospel to them – and they get very angry and tell you they do not want to hear it. Or, after they have seen a play or drama about where they will end up without the salvation that is in Christ, they say they want to know more, but when visited a couple of days later, they express little to no interest in the Gospel or the things of God.

In the final analysis, what is really going on here borders on rank heresy. Why? Because those individuals involved in and promoting such means and methods have set aside the plain word of God in favor of their own way. Granted, there are those who claim that these methods are simply a different form of presenting the word of God. However, that is manifestly untrue, since plays, music and movies present actions and emotion more than words. Moreover, instead of being mentally

engaging, the tendency is to shut off thinking altogether and let the emotions have free reign when watching, or listening, to plays, music and movies. Even though a person may do this when someone is preaching, it is generally not the case, as they must engage the mind to listen to the words, since the words are where the attention is focused.

Secondly, and much more distressing, the reality is that presenting plays, drama, music, movies, etc., relieves the individuals participating in such endeavors of the personal burden of presenting the Gospel to those around them. Instead, the burden is shifted to the 'group.' This is a very convenient way of avoiding a bitter reality for many professed 'Christians': that they have no real message of Christ to bring, because they do not know Him personally.