Preachers' Pen Points

Dealing with Disagreements

(Continuing Our Series on Church Growth & Decline)

As Christians there are common elements that have brought us together as a congregation. We have embraced the gospel with its unifying principles (Eph. 4:1-6). Embracing these principles gives us a platform from which to continue our spiritual growth as we study together the revelation of the apostles and prophets guided by the leadership and instruction of our pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:7-16). As a teacher in the church, I could wish that I would never say anything that anyone would disagree with; however, the truth is that everyone who teaches will eventually say something that someone in his audience will not accept as true. How we handle such disagreements in our understanding of the Scripture can have a profound effect on the congregation for good or bad. Let's consider the mature way to handle such differences as they arise.

Some things we shouldn't do

- We shouldn't assume that our own understanding of every Bible subject is perfect (2 Pet. 3:18). Is it not possible that the idea with which you disagree is the very thing you may need to learn!?
- We shouldn't approach the study of Scripture with a creedal mindset (Ac. 17:11). Is our purpose for gathering together to simply rehearse the conclusions of those who've taught us and perpetuate some unwritten creed, or is it to continue an honest and open-minded study of the truth?
- We shouldn't start a propaganda war against the teacher with whom we disagree (2 Cor. 10:10). Give others credit for being sincere in their search for truth just as you want them to do for you (Mt. 7:12).
- We shouldn't feel the need to leave a congregation because we disagreed with something someone taught (Rom. 15:7). The truth is, you won't go anywhere where you will always agree with all who teach! Instead we ought exhaust every effort to come to agreement with one another!

Some things we should do!

- Realize that it is impossible for anyone who speaks often to say what everyone believes all the time (Rom. 14:5)! In almost any sermon or class someone can take issue with something that is said!
- Make sure that what you think you heard is what was said (Jn. 7:51). Sometimes we don't really understand what others are saying or why they are saying it. Go to the person for clarification about his views.
- Consider the spiritual immaturity of the person who is teaching (Heb. 5:14). As a gospel preacher, I've heard brethren unwittingly teach numerous unscriptural things in their talks, lessons, and Bible classes. In many cases, it is better to give people time to grow in their understanding rather than make an issue of every perceived incorrect statement.
- Have respect for the experience and study of those who have spent many years in teaching (1 Thes. 5:12-13). Sure, older Bible students can be wrong; but shouldn't we at least proceed cautiously in charging those with far more knowledge and experience with false teaching?