

## What Preachers Believe

Many of us, especially in the last few years, have sensed that the old observation, "we are drifting," is right on the mark. An objective analysis of changes taking place in churches of Christ is available from a study done by the Center for Church Enrichment at Abilene Christian University and reported in *The Christian Chronicle*. Researchers surveyed 348 preachers who responded from 1,200 randomly selected congregations across the country. The preachers surveyed believe in the institutional and social aspect of the work of the church. However, many of the beliefs of preachers of this persuasion permeate to faithful brethren. Therefore, this survey is helpful in identifying trends that will eventually surface among brethren who reject institutionalism and the social gospel. The following subjects found great agreement among the preachers:

- The resurrection was a real historical event (98% agreeing).
- The only form of baptism that is acceptable to God is the total immersion of a person in water (97% agreeing).
- The Bible is inerrant in all matters (96% agreeing).
- The New Testament teaches that Christians should observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday (93% agreeing).
- A cappella singing is the only acceptable form of music in the public assemblies of the church (80% agreeing).
- There is no acceptable leadership role for women in the public worship assemblies of the church (75% agreeing).

Unfortunately, those results are not the full story. The following subjects found great disagreement among the same preachers:

- It is important that all scripture reading in the public worship assemblies of the church come from only one translation (93% disagreeing).
- It would be acceptable to God for a woman to preach in a church's public worship assemblies (89% disagreeing).
- Some people today receive revelation through the direct activity of the Holy Spirit in their lives (87% disagreeing).
- It would be permissible for a woman to teach in adult Bible classes when both men and women are present (76% disagreeing).

Furthermore, the preachers were more evenly divided on several questions. 49% agreed that "Items such as special music by small groups and dramatic skits have no place in the worship assembly" while 42% disagreed. 56% believe that instrumental music endangers the salvation of those who participate with it while 28% disagree and 17% are uncertain. 37% believe it

is acceptable for a congregation to observe religious holidays like Christmas and Easter through special worship experiences. Only 40% agree that "one who has been divorced without a scriptural reason and is remarried cannot be a member of the church in full fellowship while remaining in the subsequent marriage." 46% are willing to accept such persons into the full fellowship of the church.

Similar surveys in other religious groups indicate that preachers tend to be more "liberal" than people in the pews. So we might find these results encouraging in a few respects. An overwhelming majority of preachers still hold a high view of the Bible as the inerrant, inspired word of God. It is sad to celebrate even a one percent disagreement with this belief, but surveys of denominational preachers show much, much lower support for the Bible. This at least shows that a strong majority has not shifted in acceptance of fundamental doctrines.

Two areas of concern are evident. The first is acceptance of changes in worship. While most favor a cappella music, a sizable minority does not see instrumental music as a sin which endangers one's salvation. This indicates a softening in a very important issue. Likewise, significant minorities appear to have no problem with religious holiday observances and special music (i.e., choruses or choirs) in worship. A second concern is the willingness to accept an unscripturally divorced and remarried person into the fellowship of the church.

Moreover, there is cause for alarm in the minorities represented. 6% do not strongly believe in the virgin birth of Christ. Almost 25% either are uncertain or do not reject a woman teaching a mixed adult class. 20% are ready to accept instrumental music. A separate survey of so-called "youth" and "education ministers" shows a significantly more liberal stand on issues. Half this group call themselves "moderate" while only 36% describe themselves as "conservatives."

It should be of great concern that a more liberal element is increasing among liberal preachers. We have time to teach biblical truths and stop the erosion that is occurring and will occur among our brethren. If we fail to meet our responsibilities, the results from a survey like this taken 25 or 50 years from now might be disastrously different among conservative brethren.

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