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"Paul Preached Unto Them"

- Ac 20:7

Gene Edwards does a great job in his book, *How to Meet*, in explaining where the Sunday morning "sit, listen, and be quiet" meeting came from. If you read the book, you find out that it sure wasn't from the Bible. He blames John Calvin for the whole mess. One has to admit that no matter how good the speaker is that we may be listening to from week to week, we come to the place where this person just has nothing left to say that we haven't heard already, particularly after thirty years. The weekly sermon thing is a study in insanity.

This is not to fault the people involved in this practice. They are some of the finest folks you'll ever meet. The fault lies with the system that creates this practice. What incredible pressure is put upon a man when he is forced, week after week, to declare the oracle of God. Most of us just aren't that spiritual. Nor do we really have that much to say, at least not thirty years' worth to the same audience. Even Jesus only taught for three-and-a-half years! Just what did they do in the Bible when they met?

In the book of Acts, we find the early church doing many things. They prayed together (Ac 2:42; 20:7-20), ate together (1 Co 11:17-34), met together (with each one exercising some sort of spiritual gift (1 Co 14:26), had fellowship together (Ac 2:42), and yes, they even had "teaching" together (Ac 2:42; 20:7). There it is-the sermon! They had "teaching" together-a weekly sermon? Maybe the "teaching" of the first reference, Ac 2:42, could vaguely resemble a sermon, but there is absolutely no way to get a sermon out of Ac 20:7. At best it was kind of a benevolent, organized argument, with questions, answers, and opinions flying all over the place.

In your mind you hear the word "sermon" and immediately there pops into view all the Sundays as a kid you wanted to be somewhere else-immediately followed by the same thought about all the Sundays as an adult you wanted to be some place else. I have great news! There is nothing even remotely like any of this in the Bible. Why do I say this? Greek, that's why.

There is, in Ac 20:7, a marvelously liberating, wonderful Greek word that sometimes is not translated correctly: the word is *dialegomai*. You are really going to like this word. There is absolutely no way this word can be translated "to preach, teach, or sermonize." The basic meaning of this word is to "have a conversation." There has to be more than one person talking to have a conversation, right? This could even be a "heated conversation," hence, a "controlled argument."

Go to the verse in Acts that long-winded preachers have used for centuries to justify their long-windedness: Ac 20:7-9. You know the scene. Paul is meeting with the saints at Troas, probably for the last time, and he "preached" so long that a boy went to sleep in the window and fell out.

"If Paul could preach all night long, then why can't I?" That's what they say. My answer: first of all, you aren't Paul. Second, Paul wasn't preaching; he was having a conversation (*dialegomai*). You know, he talked. They talked. He talked some more. They talked some more. Questions. Answers.

More questions. More answers. Haven't you ever done this till the wee hours of the night? A boring sermon? Not on your life! Besides, I bet you couldn't raise someone in your congregation from the dead like Paul did that boy!

This same word, *dialegomai*, is used in Ac 17:2; 17:7; 18:4; 18:19; 19:8, 9; 20:7, 9; and 24:12, 25. Read them and rejoice! This word is even the one used in Jude about the angel arguing with Satan over Moses's body. Get a sermon out of that! The early church just didn't do it.

Was there ever preaching? There were times when Jesus, Peter, Paul, and all the rest did preach. They preached to people who did not know the gospel or who had only recently heard the gospel. (This was probably the context for the word *didache*, "teaching," in Ac 2:42.) When this was the case, there were entirely different Greek words used.

The Greek word *kerusso* is used thirty-two times, usually translated "preaching," with the preaching being directly related to presenting the good news of salvation to people who have not heard before (look under "preach" in Strong's *Concordance*). The word *euangello* is used eighteen times in the same context. Maybe that denominational preacher, if he really likes to preach, should do so on a street corner somewhere instead of in a religious building each week (see "gospel" in Strong's *Concordance*).

Justification for the weekly Sunday morning "sit down, be quiet, and listen to a sermon" ritual is just not in the New Testament. However, there are times when, as a Christian, you should sit and listen to someone who knows more than you. The difference is that you have the biblical heritage of being able, perhaps even while that person is speaking, to ask a question or make a comment. I'm sure those synagogue sessions with Paul were anything but polite.

Seldom should meetings for Christians ever take the form of "sit down, be quiet, and listen." Just think, if you join the revolution, you may never have to sit through another sermon again. You won't even have to feel guilty about it. Wow! What a thought!

- A.H.

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