

I was a little shocked the next day when one of the spiritual leaders of the congregation came by to talk with me. He expressed concern about my sermon from the previous day. He told me, “I don’t disagree with anything you said yesterday. I just don’t think that the pulpit is the appropriate place to say such things.” Knowing sometimes the truth can be controversial, his comment was a reminder that I should always be careful about my tact, tone, and timing in my lessons. But his comment also caused me to give serious thought to what I truly believed.

Around six months later, I was teaching a Bible class. I don’t remember what the topic was but unrelated to the subject at hand someone asked a random question about the Church being a denomination. I answered in what could be described as an abbreviated version of the sermon I had given months earlier. I didn’t think much about it until the next day when that same spiritual leader came to pay me a visit. He told me, “I don’t disagree with anything that you said yesterday. I just don’t think that a Bible Class is the appropriate place to say such things.” Very gently, I inquired, “*When would be a good time to talk about such issues?*” He told me that he didn’t really know.

I found these exchanges very frustrating, but, ultimately, they were very helpful in my spiritual growth. The problem this spiritual leader was having was not with the pulpit or the Bible Class. **The issue was that he didn’t really believe the things I was saying about the nature of the Church and coming out from denominationalism.** He said that he believed these things—he assured me that he believed these things privately—**but not enough for them to ever be spoken publicly.** *That is really no belief at all.*

It reminds me of those rulers in John 12:42 who are described as believing in Jesus, “but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.” The problem was not that they didn’t *know* the truth—the problem was that “they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God” (John 12:43). Saying what the Bible says about denominationalism in such a direct way has implications and repercussions. The truth always does. It is these implications that are so hard to swallow, and thus many people avoid plain teachings of scripture.

Avoiding tough issues not only takes place on the individual level but, unfortunately, on the congregational level as well. There are entire congregations who think of themselves and perhaps have a reputation for being sound and conservative, yet they stopped talking about areas of God’s revelation that might be considered controversial or somehow not uplifting. **We must do some open and honest evaluation of our personal testimony and our congregational teaching to ask, “Am I actually teaching all that I claim to believe?”**

I know that everyone will have their own style and timing. Some will be more forward and

direct than makes me comfortable. Some will be painstakingly slow and methodical when compared to my preferred approach. That is okay. There is a place for both of these approaches and everything in between. The problem I'm concerned about is not the *way* we approach controversial ideas (another article for another time!), *but that we are not addressing them at all*. In effect, **we might as well stop saying that we believe those difficult doctrines because we never teach them. The next generation will not even believe because they will have never heard them.**

Over a five year period, you may or may not preach a lesson about Ezekiel or eating in the church building, and—depending on where you live—the faith of the body may still be strong never having heard such lessons. In contrast, there are specific “hot button” issues that *are* going to come up by the nature of the culture in which we live. I do not want to be so presumptuous in telling you what you have to preach on in your congregation, but—if you have not addressed certain things in any way over the last five years (I'm trying to be generous)—**you might as well stop saying you believe anything about them.**

When was the last time you preached or heard a sermon on *abortion, adultery, alcohol, authority* in our worship, *baptism, denominationalism, love, homosexuality, the use of money, race, or the roles of men and women*? You might be able to add to that list. If you are not addressing these issues, I can guarantee that it has nothing to do with the fact that they have not come up. I find it hard to imagine a congregation where questions about these issues are *not* being faced by almost every member on a regular basis. The last will and testament of Jesus offers direction for these topics. While some have made the mistake of turning these teachings of Jesus into the whole Gospel, it is equally dangerous when they are avoided as if they have no part in the Gospel.

Believing something involves more than merely marking “yes” or “no” when someone asks us directly. Belief involves a willingness to speak up for the things of God (John 12:44). This is not simply telling others how *right* we are and how *wrong* they are. We need to speak out on these issues is because they show the path to eternal life (John 12:50). God is trying to show us a better way, and He is calling us to light that path for others even when we or they might not want to hear it.

I cannot help but think of one of the great quotes from Church history,

“If I profess, with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition, every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christianity. Where the battle rages the loyalty of the soldier is

proved; and to be steady on all the battle-field besides is mere flight and disgrace to him if he flinches at that one point.”

May we never shrink back from proclaiming the things we claim to believe either in the pulpit or in our daily exchanges with a world that desperately needs to hear the words of God.