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PRESENTS

Frankly Speaking Notes . . .

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Ed Smithson, Editor

THE INVITATION

Ever since I can remember, from a very young age, I have been going to worship services. I remember in my very early days we met at the schoolhouse in the community in which we lived. It could have been one of those “community” things, where people just wanted to worship and didn’t have any particular hang-ups. There was certainly no piano and there were different kinds of speakers. Sometimes we just had “Sunday School” and little else.

Shortly thereafter we went further to attend services at a church of Christ. From the very beginning I remember there was always an invitation. As I grew older and began preaching myself, there was always an invitation. People were encouraged to “come forward” at the end of the lesson to make their desires known to obey the gospel or be “restored.”

Somewhere along the line I began to wonder where this was coming from. Perhaps it was that I had a hard time coming up with a unique way to give the invitation. Its pretty standard stuff so it is difficult to come up with different ways of extending it.

Then one day I got to thinking about why it was so important. So I started looking at the scripture with particular interest in the times the invitation was extended. To my surprise, I found none! The kind of invitation we use was not found.

Some years ago a friend of mine and I attended a service of the church of some kind, I believe it was a gospel meeting, and when the speaker finished, he just thanked the audience and sat down. My friend went ballistic! How dare this guy presume to preach the gospel and not give an invitation at the conclusion of the lesson? I listened for a while and then I

asked him why he was so upset. He went on for a while and then I asked him to show me in the Bible where such was a practice of the church. He could not!

Now before you throw me to the wolves and cause me to be eaten alive give me a little time. Would you believe it if I told you that the invitation we are so insistent on today came to us from some other than a Bible source? There is no other explanation. Every denominational service that I ever attended had an invitation. In fact, at one time we were going a little further in invitations by extending them longer and pleading for response. I have never believed that was a good practice.

I was involved in a gospel meeting one time when the preacher had some three songs for the invitation. He walked the isles and begged people to respond. Once it started there was a flood. 54 answered "the call" that night. Want to know the range in age? From 7 to 13! I declined to baptize some of the younger ones and their parents thanked me later. Others, not their parents, were critical of me for such a practice.

I have heard recently of some preachers making the announcement that they will be at the building in mid-afternoon on Sunday if anyone wants to talk to them. The result has been that some people have been baptized under those circumstances. Not a bad idea when you think about it.

Some people have a fear of "displaying themselves" as one person put it one time, in front of an audience at the church building. I cannot tell you how many times I have assisted people in obeying the gospel or returning to their first love in the privacy of their homes. I remember one couple many years ago that I was visiting and encouraging their response. I found out the lady had such a fear. When I told her we could take care of that then and there she was shocked. She had never heard of such.

Another incident when I was in a gospel meeting there was a man in the community in which some members were interested and some had encouraged him to no avail. A brother took me with him to visit. The only problem was that he did not want to be baptized in a baptistery. The following day we took him to a nearby tank of water and accomplished the baptism.

We have used the “standard” invitation for so long some believe that is the only way. Not so!

Brethren, as long as I can remember we have said, “We speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent.” In this, it is simply not true.

I don’t know that I know the best way to handle this. There is certainly nothing wrong with extending some kind of encouragement at the end of a lesson. However, to DEMAND that it be done is certainly not scriptural and flies in the face of the slogan we have used so long.

We have done this so long it has become a tradition and has the effect of law. Some folks think it is absolutely necessary. While there is nothing wrong with extending an invitation at the end of the lesson, there are other ways to encourage people to obey their Lord. We should be working on that!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ed Amithwa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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