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How Can We Identify Gospel Preachers Today?

By Jared Williams

I believe you will agree that there is a bombardment of preaching being done today. Many preachers claim direct revelations from God and some claim miraculous powers, for the purpose of leading us to think they are all preachers of the gospel of Christ. So, many feel that as long as a person calls himself a preacher even regardless of what he preaches, he is God's spokesman. But, what is the real truth? How can we know for sure that one is a gospel preacher? Friends, the Bible, God's Book, is the source we must look to in determining who is who. Do you believe the Bible is the true and only source we can look to for real truth? It was our Blessed Lord who said, "and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). He further declared what truth is, "sanctify them through thy truth: Thy word is truth" (John 17:17)". If there are any doubts as to what source we should turn to, this should settle the matter.

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15). We must never forget what Peter said, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destructions" (II Peter 2:1). John calls upon all to "... believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: Because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). Friends, the Bible teaches there are false preachers and teachers. How can we identify, or know them.

1. A Gospel preacher is not a denominational preacher. One who loves, understands and appreciates God's word will not teach and uphold the creeds of men. A gospel preacher will not endorse the religions of men, nor will he be a part of them. You will not hear a gospel preacher

talk about "my church", "our church", rather he will promote the "Lord's church" (Matthew 16:18).

Paul said to a gospel preacher, "I CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; PREACH THE WORD; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine:" (II Timothy 4:1,2).

The gospel preacher has been charged from high heaven to PREACH THE WORD OF GOD and he will do that very thing. He will preach the doctrine of Christ, not the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9).

2. A gospel preacher is not a compromiser of truth. The gospel preacher will not give any uncertain sounds, rather he will prove all things (I Thessalonians 5:21). He will preach, "there is One body, and One Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, One faith, One baptism, One God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:4-6). Yes, he will preach there is ONE BODY, this is the Lord's church (Acts 47). He will preach there is ONE BAPTISM, this is water baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 22:16). He will preach there is ONE FAITH, this is the gospel of Christ which declares that God is, that Jesus is His only begotten Son and that the church is divinely derived. The gospel preacher will not preach one religion is as good as another or take the religion of your choice. The religion of Christ, Christianity is not the same as Judaism, denominationalism, Catholicism or any other man made religion. He realizes, to preach another gospel, a perverted gospel brings a curse from heaven. (Galatians 1:8).

3. A gospel preacher preaches with

plainness and simplicity of speech (II Corinthians 3:12; 11:3). Upon hearing a gospel preacher you can perceive immediately that he condemns error and worldliness. These are great dangers to the soul and he wants all men to be saved. Thus, he follows the example of Christ as He condemned the Pharisees and Saducees for their error and manner of living (Matthew 23).

4. A gospel preacher will not exalt himself by wearing titles. He will not refer to himself as "Reverend" or "Father". Upon reading the Bible he knows that no man in the spiritual sense should be called "father", for God is our Father (Matthew 23:8,9). Did you know that the term reverend is used one time in the Bible and refers to God Almighty (Psalm 111:9). For men to wear this as a title is to exalt themselves as God, and such is condemned in God's word. There are such titles as clergy and laity, these would divide Christians as though there are different classes of Christians. The Bible teaches that Christians are one in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29).

5. A gospel preacher in preaching the gospel of Christ will by the scriptures show that Christians are to give every first day of the week as God has prospered them, to support the cause of Christ (I Corinthians 16:1,2). He will urge people to give cheerfully and joyfully (II Corinthians 9:6-8). He will not go around begging for money with sad stories of how deep in debt his institution is, wanting the world to support his cause. The gospel preacher will preach that it is Christians responsibility to give, not the world, to carry on the work of Christ.

There are other areas we could discuss as to how to identify a gospel preacher, but, to sum it up his preaching will center in Christ. Remember John said, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

Read God's word for yourself rightly dividing it.

Rejecting things because they are old-fashioned would rule out sunshine.

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The All-Sufficiency Of The Bible

By Mark K. Lewis

There can be no doubt that more error has arisen because of a denial of this Bible truth than any other doctrine. This writer is not acquainted with any church - save the church of Christ - which teaches that the Bible is all we need for salvation (and, indeed, there are many even in the Lord's body who so deny). They may say they believe the Bible is enough; but somewhere down the line they have their creed book or modern revelations or, more likely, the direct action of the Holy Spirit in some form or fashion to convict, convert, sanctify and guide. Thus, by implication, they deny the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. Let me emphasize with all of my being, that if we could get people to understand one thing we could stop much outrageous error; and that one thing is: **The very minute we say the Holy Spirit directly touches the heart, soul, or mind of man, we have denied the all-sufficiency of the Bible for man's salvation!** Now, the key word is directly; we insist that the Holy Spirit is active in man's conviction, conversion, and ultimate salvation. But He works only through a means, or indirectly, through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit NEVER - we repeat, NEVER - directly touches a human being (unless He "Personally" indwells the Christian, and even if so - which this writer does not believe - we do not even know that apart from the Bible and He does nothing apart from the Bible). If we are going to believe and teach the all-sufficiency of the Bible, we are going to have to be willing to accept the implications of that teaching, viz., no direct action of the Holy Spirit, no modern revelation, no authority in creeds or councils, no leading

by "hunches", "voices in the night", or "lights by our bedpost". (We do, of course, believe the Holy Spirit works in providence in ways of which we know nothing. What we are here affirming is that the Spirit never works upon or within man apart from the Word of God. Providential work or what the Spirit may do in heaven [Romans 8:26] is outside the purview of the direction of this article.)

But we must set out upon our proof. To assert a thing, and to prove it are two different matters, of course. Does the Bible teach that the Bible is enough? If it does not, then we have no right to make such a claim. If the Bible does assert its own all-sufficiency, then some need to look again at their doctrine. Let us emphatically insist, before we go farther, that we believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the 66 books of the Old and New Testament. It is God's only and complete written revelation to man. We are not worshipping the Bible; we worship only God. But if God speaks only through the Bible, we had best not listen to anything else, for if something in religion doesn't come from God, it comes from Satan.

So, what does the Bible say about itself?

1. The Word of God is God's power to save. Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." If the Word is powerful enough for salvation, what else is needed?

2. The Word of God sets us free from sin. In John 8:32, Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." The freedom mentioned here is from sin (see vs.34). Jesus, in His prayer of John 17, informs us in verse 17 that "Thy (God's) Word is truth". Thus, the Word frees us from sin.

3. Obedience to the Word of God purifies our souls. In I Peter 1:22, Peter writes, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth". The Bible purifies our souls.

4. The Word of God cleans us. John 15:3 records Jesus saying, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you". The Word cleans us.

5. The Word of God comforts us. Paul instructs the Thessalonians "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (I Thessalonians 4:18). How safe we can feel knowing we can find comfort in God's precious Book!

6. The Word of God makes us perfect, complete, and fits us for every

good work. In the powerful passage, II Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle to the Gentiles writes, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works". If the Bible is sufficient to make a man "perfect", to "thoroughly" (through and through) furnish him to "all good works", what else do we need? Why look for direct action of the Holy Spirit? Which leads to our next point . . .

7. The Word of God is spiritual and life-giving. In John 6:63, our Lord tells us that "the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Jesus is saying that His Word is spiritual and life-giving. Can the Holy Spirit make us more spiritual, or give us more life than the Words of Christ? Not if the Word can make us perfect (II Timothy 3:16-17).

8. The Word of God saves our souls. James 1:21 exhorts us to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls". Jesus challenged the Jews to "search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me". (John 5:39). Anyone who wants more than eternal life does not have the spirit of Christ. And the Bible is fully able to save our souls.

9. The Word of God guards us from sin. Notice these beautiful refrains from the Psalms: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee"; "the law of his (the righteous man's) God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide"; "by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer. (119:11; 37:31; 17:4). We have the full protection of God's Word to keep us from sin; do we need anything else?

10. The Word of God begets us. Paul reminds the Corinthians in I Corinthians 4:15, "I have begotten you through the gospel". In I Peter 1:23, Peter says "being born (or begotten-ASV) again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever". Indeed, "the seed of the Kingdom is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11).

11. The Word of God guides us. "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." (Psalms 73:24) If the Word of God guides me to glory, I would be hesitant to trust any hunch or feeling or some man who claims he got a modern revelation. In Psalm 119:105, the Psalmist beautifully says, "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path". The Bible leads us through life.

12. The Word of God gives us wisdom. Paul reminded Timothy that "the holy scriptures", which Timothy had learned since childhood, "are able to make thee wise unto salvation" (II Timothy 3:15). The Psalmist concurs in 19:7, "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." If poor Joseph Smith, the Mormon "prophet", had looked to the only Source of wisdom when he prayed for it as a youth, he might have saved his soul and not led millions to eternal destruction with him. Gentle reader, if you want wisdom, read "The holy scriptures".

13. The Word of God gives faith. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Notice he did not say "Faith cometh by direct action of the Holy Spirit". Faith comes from the Word of God.

14. The Word of God gives understanding. Psalm 119:104: "Through thy precepts I get understanding".

15. The Word of God enlightens us. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Psalm 119:130). Can anything add "light" to the Word of God?

16. The Word of God strengthens us. Many think they need some kind of direct help from the Holy Spirit to strengthen them through trials, temptations, etc. But Psalm 119:28 provides the key: "My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word." The Living Bible's comment on this is, "Encourage and cheer me with your words." Proverbs 24:5 tells us that "a man of knowledge increaseth strength." Indeed, the Word of God is the great source of strength and courage.

17. The Word of God fits us for Glory. Paul, in his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, gave them this final exhortation in Acts 20:32: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified". We are spiritual criminals - against the world and ourselves - if we fail to drink deeply of this life giving source.

18. The Word of God heals the soul's diseases. In Psalm 107:20, we find the magnificent refrain, "He sent His Word and healed them". There is no spiritual disease that cannot be cured by an application of God's medicine, the Holy Bible.

19. The Word of God sanctifies us. In John 17:17, Jesus said "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy Word is truth". Sanctification is not a miraculous or

multi-staged process or done directly by the Holy Spirit. It is accomplished through obedience to the Word of Scripture (cf I Peter 1:22).

Is there need to go on? We have demonstrated that the Word of God is God's power to save, frees us from sin, purifies us, cleans us, comforts us, makes us perfect, supplies for every good work, is spiritual and life-giving, saves our souls, guards us from sin, begets us, guides us, gives us wisdom, gives faith, gives understanding, enlightens us, strengthens us, fits us for glory, heals our soul's diseases, and sanctifies us. And the crowning verse is Psalm 19:7 "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul". If God's word is perfect, if it converts the soul, nothing else is needed. And, again, the moment we say we need anything else - be it modern revelations, or direct help of the Spirit we have, by implication, denied the all sufficiency of the Bible. Truly, we should repeat after Job, "I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12).

Let us truly hold consistently to the all-sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures. Don't be deceived by inner feeling or hunches; the Bible affirms that you do not have to trust in something so nebulous or inconclusive as a feeling. You have only been taught by man that what you feel is the Holy Spirit of God; the Muslim is taught by his teachers that he has the "Spirit of Allah", and his proof (his feelings) is as good as yours. Listen to the "more sure" words of God (II Peter 1:19).

We close with this matchless refrain: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward" (Psalm 19:7-11).

Does The Church Of Christ Believe In Music In Worship?

By Larry D. Mathis

One asks, "Why doesn't the church of Christ believe in music in worship?" As you know this question is raised because we do not use mechanical instruments of music in our worship services.

The real issue does not involve "not believing in music". It is incorrect, and a misrepresentation, to say, "The church of Christ doesn't believe in music". As a matter of fact, yes, we do believe in music in worship, and yes, we do have music in our worship services.

The question is not, "Why doesn't the church of Christ believe in music in worship?" but, "Why does the church of Christ 'sing' only?" "Why does the church of Christ have vocal music exclusively in their worship services?"

Only Two Kinds Of Music. As regards the totality of music there are two kinds: (1) vocal; an (2) instrumental. Singing is music - it is vocal music. From some of the questions asked, it is obvious that many have never even considered this fact.

In Christian worship the Lord never authorized instrumental music, he authorized vocal music only. This point needs further clarification for even some brethren seemingly have not caught on in some places.

Although our Lord authorized vocal music in worship, it must be further pointed out that he authorized a certain type of vocal music in worship, that is, singing. To illustrate: humming and whistling are both vocal, but they fail to meet the Lord's requirement to sing. Would not "percussion" type sounds made "vocally" also fail to meet the Lord's requirement to sing? The New Testament teaches that we are to **Speak; to Teach; Admonish** in our singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) Anything that fails to do what the Lord commanded (though vocal) cannot be what he wants in worship.

A Question Of Biblical Authority. This issue involves much more than likes and dislikes in worship to Almighty God. Mechanical instruments of music are excluded from our worship services because of deep religious convictions. God has clearly outlined in the New Testament what he wants us to do as we approach him in worship. Everything must be done with his approval, with a "thus saith the Lord" attitude. See John 4:23-24; Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; I Corinthians 14:15; Romans 15:9; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12, 13:15; James 5:13.

No Divine Authority For Mechanical Instruments. There is no divine authority or approval for instruments of music in Christian worship today. Jesus never did authorize or command the use of such. Christ authorized "singing" only in the New Testament.

Did the apostles of Christ ever authorize, or command, or use mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship? Absolutely not! The Holy Spirit guided them into All Truth (John 16:13, 14:26), but he never guided them to use mechanical instruments in praise to God. Obviously then, such is no part of the truth. No New Testament writer ever practiced or sanctioned the use of instruments in Christian worship. (continued on page 4)

... MUSIC IN WORSHIP?

(continued from page 3)

The apostle Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20,27), but he did not declare instrumental music to be authorized by God. Those who walk by God's counsel will not use such either for it is innovative and sinful.

No apostolic church used mechanical instruments in worship. Name one New Testament church that used mechanical instruments of music in worship to Almighty God with his approval. It cannot be done. There is absolutely no divine authority for instrumental music in Christian worship - it is clearly forbidden and can be traced, not to the New Testament for its origin, but to the Pope of Rome.

Additional Observations. Man is not a legislator for God; he must not make laws for the Lord; he must not legislate as to the way men shall worship Jehovah. God knows more about what pleases him than does mere man! God has told us in his word what he expects and man had better not tamper with it (Deuteronomy 4:2; Galatians 1:8-9).

Those who refuse to listen to God; who refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ, **Have not God** (2 John 9). The command is to "sing" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), not "play". Playing mechanical instruments is something the Lord did not command. Those who "play" have gone beyond God's written word and have become rebels.

To do all "in the name of the Lord" means to act by his authority (Col.3 :17; Acts 10:48). One cannot play mechanical instruments in worship by our Lord's authority for he did not authorize such.

Some say, "Let's have singing and instrumental music too?" However, that will not do, it would be more than what the Lord commanded. Others say, "Instrumental music is better." May we ask, "Better to whom?" "Are we trying to please men?" "Are we trying to entertain spectators?" "Are we putting on a performance?"

We need a greater desire to please the Lord, not man (Galatians 1:10). We are instructed to praise God with the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15), not with a piece of machinery (Acts 17:24-25).

Instruments, such as the organ, flood the building with sound that prevents the worshippers from even hearing their own voices, much less the voices of others, thus, they disobey God's command to teach and admonish while singing!

Did the early Christians sing or play in worship? Did they obey or disobey God? You know as well as I do that they obeyed him by singing, not playing, in worship.

There is absolutely no divine authority whatsoever today for instrumental music in Christian worship. The organ was introduced by the Pope of Rome -- it was not authorized by high heaven; it is a corruption of the gospel of Christ. We believe in music in worship, and we have it. We "sing" as the Lord directed.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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