

WOULD THE REAL BAPTISTS CHURCHES PLEASE STAND UP?

By: Jeremiah J. Sargent

During the past few weeks, I have received several phone calls and e-mails from evangelists (“evangelist” is the scriptural term for a missionary – Ephesians 4:11) requesting an opportunity to present their field of ministry to our church. Most of the men I hear from are just starting out on deputation and are seeking to raise financial support. Their main goal is to set up a meeting in hopes of gaining a supporting church! Now I don’t mind them contacting me, because it is truly exciting to hear their enthusiasm about God’s call upon their life and their determination to get to the field as soon as possible. I am thankful the Lord of the Harvest is still answering prayer by calling men — not just older men, but men of this generation — to do the work of an evangelist. We would all agree that there is a tremendous need for more Gospel-preaching churches to be planted around this world!

But this article is not about evangelism’s methodology or the enormous responsibility Baptist churches have in fulfilling the Great Commission. It is about a **question**: a question often asked of me. This question is not unethical, nor is it unreasonable. In fact, during a typical conversation between a pastor and an evangelist, many questions will be asked — most of which are directed towards the evangelist. Questions such as: “Who is your sending church?; Are you associated with a mission board?; What are your doctrinal beliefs?; and When do you plan to be in the area?” Like many pastors, I have a standard set of questions I pose in order to determine whether or not I will schedule a man for a meeting. I try not to make it a “Spanish Inquisition” or a “KGB interrogation,” but in the interest of protecting God’s flock and keeping the influences upon it scriptural, I want to know some things about the evangelist who is asking to stand in our pulpit! I take every aspect of the Lord’s work seriously, knowing that one day I will give an account to the Chief Shepherd regarding who I allowed to feed His flock and what ministries I lead them to support. The apostle Paul reiterates the seriousness of a pastor’s decision in these matters.

*“**Take heed** therefore...to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. **Also of your own selves** shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. **Therefore watch**...” — Acts 20:28*

A church’s mission program should not quickly offer support to any man who calls himself a “Baptist evangelist.” Would we allow just “any man” to join our pastoral team or pastor our church? No! We would examine that man to make sure he meets the qualifications found in First Timothy chapter three. We would want to be confident that that man is sound in faith and doctrine!

The same principle must be followed when joining together with another church's mission work — the supporting church, the evangelist, and the ministry envisioned should be diligently examined as to its doctrine and adherence to the scriptures. Questions, and the answers to those questions, reveal a man's beliefs, training, and practice. I think we would all agree that time is too short and our finances are too lean to be investing in men and ministries that are not following God's plan!

But those are my questions. What about *their* question? As our conversation draws to an end and the promise of checking our calendars is reaffirmed, the question invariably comes: "Do you know of any other churches in your area I can call?" Now of course, you know they are not asking for the Catholic priest's phone number or the address to the seeker-friendly Bible church down the road. They are interested in other independent Baptist churches like yours! Their question involves more than just finding churches that are mission-minded and offer financial support; it is finding Baptist churches that are scriptural.

You may be thinking, "What is so difficult about that question?" Surely you have a directory of Independent Baptist churches in your office or a website on your computer. Just give them a few of your favorite pastors' and churches' names. Well, here is the problem: they have already called those in the directories and are discovering that many of the Independent Baptist churches listed are not altogether scriptural. Now before you get upset with that statement, understand these men are not out there judging and labeling churches; they are simply looking for churches of like faith and order to help support their ministry! They are comparing what they observe in the church and read in their doctrinal statements with the Word of God. The concern and discouragement comes when they find that $2 + 2$ is not equaling 4! "What are they seeing?" you ask. Well, here are a few things: Independent Baptist churches that hold to a "universal church" concept, practice open-baptism and open-communion, glorify men, have weak convictions on the King James Bible, have low standards of personal holiness; churches that allow contemporary-style worship "music;" divorced men in pastorate; seeker-friendly programs ... and the list goes on! The name on the door does not match what is inside!

I praise the Lord that many evangelists are taking a biblical stand of separation when it comes to looking for supporting churches. The temptation to overlook doctrinal issues so as not to jeopardize potential financial support must be enormous and, with the deputation trail having its own set of difficulties, finding fewer churches that actually ***practice*** the Word of God is discouraging.

These are the evangelist's setbacks on the deputation trail. MY dilemma is this: When an evangelist asks me the question, "Do you know of any other churches in your area I can call?" I don't have too many names to share with them. Sadly, many of the churches I know used to stand for the faith, but have taken a detour down the road of compromise — and those who are still standing firm, already support them. Now maybe I need to get out more! Surely there are more churches than I know of that practice the Biblical faith of the Baptists and stand against the modern pressures. I know my church is not alone! So here is my challenge to you: Would the real Baptist churches please stand up and let these men know that you are out

there?!! You are missing out on knowing and supporting some faithful Baptist men who are striving to evangelize a lost world God's way.