

'Gospel' meeting or 'gossip' meeting?

By Andrew Roberts

Flyers are mailed out: "Come To Our Gospel Meeting at the Anytown church of Christ." We read: Brother Somebody from Elsewhereville will be preaching. We are very familiar with this method of evangelistic outreach to a community. We check our calendars and try to make it to a night or two of the meeting, especially if we have heard Brother Somebody preach before.

It is always encouraging to see another congregation reaching out to the community with an evangelistic effort. However, is it always the gospel, the unadulterated word of God, the good news for a lost world, being preached? After all, what 'Gospel Meeting' would be complete without the Thursday night sermon, "Keeping The Church Pure" or the Friday night topic, "Danger of A New Apostasy."

Such sermons provide Brother Somebody a forum to sound off about what he has heard concerning practices or policies of various congregations in the county or what "concerns him deeply about the brotherhood" at large. Brother Somebody has been preaching for years. He has traveled all over the country and written for our periodicals. He is very influential with young preachers and they look to him for training, advice and approval. If Brother Somebody preaches it, then it must be so. It becomes gospel.

So we make the long drive out to Anytown for our Thursday dose of "Present Trends In The Church", and much to our dismay the object of Brother Somebody's wrath is our home congregation! What a horrible feeling. Our people are being dressed down in front of all the brethren in the county. Suddenly, saintly Brother Somebody begins to grow horns as he snaps his fingers through another charge of heresy laid at our feet.

But infinitely worse is knowing full well that Brother Somebody has NEVER contacted any of the elders or the preacher of the targeted church to verify his inflammatory claims. Brother Somebody rages on with accusations, exposing 'practices' that the judged-and-condemned congregation has never practiced!

Stunned and disillusioned we look around the Anytown auditorium. It is packed... but we know everyone in attendance. They are from congregations all over the county, having obeyed the gospel decades ago, their presence is to support the evangelistic effort of Anytown and hear Brother Somebody, just like us. We realize that this is not a gospel meeting at all. What Brother Somebody is preaching as pure gospel is in fact unadulterated gossip!

Leaving the Anytown church of Christ we are faced with a question to answer: "Was Brother Somebody's sermon actually a reflection on himself, or on those he denounced?" If he had bothered to research and verify his claims by speaking and studying with primary sources before making his accusations in self-righteous indignation, then we SHOULD seriously consider his message. However, knowing full

well he did not do the necessary research, if by no other reason than his gross misrepresentations, he has sinned. He has repeated second-hand information, he has gossiped. He has provided a text-book example of “sowing seeds of discord.” If he would treat his brethren in such an under-handed fashion, how has he treated others he has preached about in the past?

When any preacher stands before an audience to speak from the word of God, he has the responsibility to stick to the Bible. If he seeks to make application of Bible truths in the context of error existing in a local congregation, he has the responsibility to thoroughly research and honestly represent the practice he deems as error. If he does not, he is simply preaching misrepresentation, rumor and opinions with a little scripture thrown in to make sure it is ‘sound’.

An audience also has a responsibility to listen intently and compare the message being preached with the scripture being cited. If there is concern about something that was said, why not ask the preacher for his sources? We might all be surprised that the sermon we heard was not good news of salvation, but rather damnable gossip.