



Writing for the 'Question Box' is an interesting experience because the questions arrive from a variety of sources. Very often they come from brothers or sisters who are known to me personally and from congregations that I know well.

Others arrive from overseas, and the people who write generally explain their reason for writing so that I have some idea of the problem/s with which they have to deal. In such cases, to use a popular, if ungrammatical

expression, 'I know where they are coming from'. I can see with reasonable clarity how best to reply.

I might also add that very occasionally, a question will arrive without any indication of the identity of the sender or the place of origin, and, of course, this makes it more difficult to decide how to respond.

A Cry from the Heart!

This month, however, an issue has been raised which is somewhat different from the subjects we are usual asked to consider. I invite you to consider several questions that have been supplied by someone who, I suspect, is young in the faith – and perhaps also young in years. Judge for yourself. Here are the 'questions' just as I have received them.

- 1) ***"It happens that sometimes babes in Christ (new Christians) feel neglected in the Church assembly".***
- 2) ***"Why do preachers sometimes preach bad sermons?"***
- 3) ***"The 'B.T.' advert says 'It's good to talk'. Yet Christians are sometimes lacking in this among themselves."***



As you no doubt will have recognized, what we have here are two obvious **statements**, numbered 1 and 3, and one rather pointed **question**, which might actually be regarded as a third statement. And I think you will understand why I have the feeling that they have come from someone young in the faith, and perhaps fairly young in years.

These statements leave me with the impression that the sender is not altogether happy or comfortable in the congregation of which he has become a member. Be that as it may, one thing is certain; he has drawn our attention to a problem, which, though sadly not new, is all too common in our congregations.

Aftercare for Babes in Christ.

Let me ask a question that should help us to focus on the problem to which I refer. **How many congregations do you know, that have set in place a programme specially designed to meet the needs of 'babes in Christ'?**

Is it not a fact that, after the initial joy of the 'birth', new Christians are all-too-often left to fend for themselves? We are all naturally delighted when a soul comes to the

Lord and is 'born of the Spirit' and brought into the Family. But the sad fact is that, all too soon, the newly-born Christian is treated in a way that would create widespread public outrage if it were to be meted out to a newly born baby, and would probably cause 'Social Services' officialdom to take action.

The Lord once said – albeit in a different context – that the children of this world are wiser in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light. (Luk.16;8), and it is absolutely indisputable that worldly organizations and societies take more care to keep their new members, and are better prepared to do so, than are most of our congregations.

The trouble is that we seem to expect babes in Christ to grow up far too quickly. I well remember that our late dear brother Leonard Morgan used to say that one of the mistakes we make is that we 'expect babes in Christ to eat off our plate!'

He meant that do not take sufficient care to ensure that new Christians – like newly born babies – receive the diet appropriate to their needs. At that state in their lives, they do not need 'strong meat', and I wonder how many have 'choked to death' on the sort of spiritual food that has been served up in their congregations?

'Bad Sermons'?

Do you think that something like this lies behind my young correspondent's rather blunt 2nd question? "Why do preachers sometimes preach bad sermons?"

I must confess that I am tempted to misappropriate a phrase from Mrs Browning's poem, and say, 'Let me count the ways!' But, let me ask; how would you answer this cry from the heart? Why do preachers 'sometimes preach bad sermons'? 'Bad', of course, must surely mean in the sense of 'boring'; 'uninteresting'; 'unhelpful', 'over-critical', 'over-long' – and probably 'over-the-head'!

These are 'effects', but what are the 'causes'? There may be many reasons. Could it be that: -

- The Preacher is not adequately prepared?
- Has not spent enough time in preparation?
- The Sermon is insufficiently thought out?
- Perhaps he made a wrong choice of subject?
- Or maybe he is just having a 'bad-hair day'?
- It might even be that he is not feeling physically very well.

Reasons? After preaching for about 65 years I admit that I am an expert in them. I think I know them all! I learned a long time ago that my sermons do not always ring everyone's bell!

However, I am glad to see the word 'sometimes' in the question! It isn't all bad, but a preacher certainly needs to give real thought to the make-up of the congregation, in order to be able to address its needs. Preaching should never be merely a matter of filling a twenty-minute spot in the service, or an opportunity for regaling the congregation with the latest bit of knowledge that one has acquired.

Feed the family! Strong meat for the mature, and the unadulterated milk of the Word for the young in faith. Let there be a varied diet, based on the recognition of the

varied needs of the congregation. Remember the young. But do not forget the old!

And always remember that no preacher has an automatic right to be heard! That has to be earned by the adequate preparation of a sermon worth hearing.

In an Irreligious Society

But, I am tempted to digress!

Let me return to my topic! In these days, when we can hardly speak of 'Christian Britain', since we see so much godlessness, irreligion and even paganism in our society, we have to work very hard indeed to bring people to Christ. The Gospel Missions and Evangelistic Campaigns that used to be so effective, are usually poorly attended by visitors, and - to be blunt about this - often badly supported by our own members. In fact, many congregations now no longer hold the Lord's Day evening meeting, which, in 'the old days', was always a time for the preaching of the Gospel. I am well aware that there may be various reasons for this situation, and they cannot be adequately discussed in 'The Question Box', but the fact remains that we are certainly not winning souls in the numbers we have seen in the past.

Losing the Saved!

This being the case, why are we so inefficient in caring for the souls we do manage to win? We struggle to bring them to the Lord, and we lead them into the Church by the only 'entrance' that has His approval, and, in very little time, we discover that they have slipped out of the back door and we have lost them again.

I think I hear something of this in the 'questions' that I have already reported. My correspondent wrote 'babes in Christ (new Christians) feel neglected in the Church assembly'. I wonder if this could be said about your congregation? - or, perhaps, about the congregation of which I am a member?

Keeping the Saved Safe.

You may have read that brother Alistair Ferrie has recently published a book entitled **"Step by Step: Aftercare for new Christians"**. Alastair does not know that I am mentioning his book in this article, but I tell you that it is the sort of guide and handbook that congregations badly need, and, if I were in a position to do so, I would ensure that every congregation had at least half-a-dozen copies on hand with which to help new brothers and sisters to become established in their faith and to find their place in the Family of God.

What we have looked at this month is something about which every congregation needs to give serious thought, and I thank my young correspondent for having brought it to our attention.

P.S. If you are interested in Alastair Ferrie's book, contact the Church in Dundee. I am fairly sure that any interested congregation could work out a good deal with these brethren.

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