

Those Were the Days By Kent Heaton

I was reading some religious journals from the 60's and found numerous times that debates were mentioned either as had happened or were being planned. There are few people today in any religious circle that remember what a debate was. Fewer still were part of those debates. Decades ago debates were quite frequent and varied from place to place. Some debates would have crowds of up to 600 to 800 people a night. One such debate spoke of nearly 1000 people in attendance. I am sure there were other debates of various sizes but the debates happened often.

The focus of the debates would examine doctrinal differences between religious groups and for many years well known men were renowned for their prowess on the debating stage. In the ones that I read after it was also noted how that each participant in the debate was cordial and respectful as they argued their position in favor or against the established point of difference. Debates would challenge Baptists, Methodists, Christian Churches, and so forth on a field of discussions ranging from the means of salvation, instruments of music, church work and benevolence, and a host of topics appealing to the minds of the religious community.

It is painfully clear that debates have fallen by the wayside. Trying to imagine a debate between two parties discussing the issues of salvation in a public venue; attended by 600-800 people each night – is truly a thing of the past. Revivals and gospel meetings rarely attain that level of interest. There seem to be some root causes for the demise of debates and public interest.

Religion is no longer a subject that people want to discuss. It either offends them to have challenges to their faith, or they have become so satisfied in their system of faith they will not discuss it. It is harder still to find many people who are interested in having a study in their home. Religion has become the manna of over satisfied self-absorbed individuals who have little time to talk about what they believe in. "You believe what you believe and I will believe what I believe" is the clarion call of the religion of convenience.

How did Jesus view this self-inflicted wound of religious pride? In Matthew 23 the Lord said, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (vv2-3). Did the Son of God suggest that it did not matter what you believed as long as you believed in God? Did Jesus Christ every challenge the religious groups of His day? "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves" (Mathew 23:15).

The apostle Paul went into the Jewish synagogues to discuss the scriptures on a frequent basis (Acts 13, 14:1, 17, 18, 19:8 - for three months). He would find few recipients today interested in debating the scriptures. Satan has dulled our senses with the frivolities of the world. Conviction has given way to convenience. Self-indulgence hearts are guided by carnal desires. Who has time to talk of the Bible? "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6). These are those days.

Speak Up

"But even after we had suffered before and were spitefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict" (1Thes. 2:2). Some people might contend that religion has no place in the office, but a recent study proves otherwise. It might be to your advantage, the study concludes, if you profess your religious

beliefs rather than keep silent about them. Professionals who actively expressed their religious beliefs were perceived to be more intelligent, more trustworthy, more moral, and better adjusted than those who did not. (From Roger Bailey and Philip Doriot via Pulpit Helps) Let us boldly speak the word of God at every opportunity regardless of what men might say or think.

Cobweb Armor

A military man was fighting along with his unit when a bomb explosion went off nearby. When the dust started to settle, he realized that he was separated from his men, and all he could see was enemy forces coming his way. He ran until he came to some caves into the hillside. He climbed into one of them, but it was not very deep, at least for him to hide from view. He prayed to God for protection as he looked around the walls of the cave and heard the enemy coming closer. A spider dropped down on a thread from the top of the cave opening, and he laughed sardonically and said, "Lord, I asked You for protection, and You sent me this puny little spider?! I was thinking of a brick wall or steel shield, Lord." He resignedly lay against the side of the cave shaking his head, watching this spider spin a web over the opening of the cave while he dreaded his moment of capture. When the enemy soldiers were near the opening of the cave, he heard one of them say, "We don't need to search this cave, as a spider web is over the entire opening. Obviously, no one has entered here in a long while." No matter what God's solutions may be, we need to remember we are NOT the superior mind, and that laughing at God's plan makes us even more ignorant of His power and glory!

The Family Bible

Old Brother Higgins built a shelf
For the family Bible to rest itself
Lest a sticky finger or grimy thumb
Might injure the delicate pages some.
He cautioned his children to touch it not
And it rested there with never a blot
Though the Higgins tribe was a troublesome lot.

His neighbor, Miggins, built a shelf
"Come children," he said, "and help yourself."
His book is old and ragged and worn,
With some of the choicest pages torn,
Where children have fingered and thumbed and read.
But of the Miggins tribe I've heard it said,
Each carries a Bible in his head.

Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves.