

Preaching *Invitation* Versus Preaching *Organization*

Tim Haile

The argument is being made that the New Testament examples of gospel preachers accepting the preaching invitations of human organizations constitutes authority for modern man-made organizations to organize and conduct Bible lectureships. Others have cited extra-biblical examples of such preaching invitations that are offered by non-church collectivities. I think it wise to examine these examples to find out what is actually authorized. Do these examples authorize an *organization*, or do they authorize an *invitation*?

One brother cited a *funeral home* as an example of an organization that may invite a preacher to preach, thus proving that a non-church organization may function in evangelism. Let us remember that these examples are cited in an effort to justify joint preaching functions, in which a business organization *arranges Bible lectureships, assigns the topics, requests advanced manuscripts of the sermons to expedite the publication of the lecture book that will be sold at the lectureship, pays for the advertising and housing of those lectureships and engages in collective worship* when assembled. Is this parallel to what is done at funeral homes? Let us consider some of the things that are wrong with the funeral home argument:

1. The funeral preacher is not engaged in *joint activity* **with** the funeral home. He preaches as much to the funeral home personnel as he does to funeral attendees.
2. I have preached many funerals over the past 25 years. In all of these funerals the preaching invitation came, *not from the funeral home*, but from family or friends of the deceased. This, however, is only *my* experience in this matter. The brother who made this argument said that he knew of cases where funeral homes had directly invited preachers to preach, and this brother is an honest man. Let us then consider such a scenario and the implications of the brother's argument.

I have preached funerals in several different funeral homes. My custom is to use the opportunity to draw the attention of serious minded people to spiritual things. I usually teach on

the importance of the soul and of gospel obedience and faithfulness. I sometimes attend funerals when other preachers do the preaching. I once attended a funeral at one of the funeral homes where I had preached just three weeks earlier. I was back at that same funeral home attending the funeral of a relative of a church member. That member's relative was a *Jehovah's Witness*, and the ceremony was conducted by a *Jehovah's Witness*. The preacher emphasized the *soullessness* of man, and assured the audience that they could "take comfort in the fact that we did not have to worry about the destiny of the deceased person's *soul*, for he had no soul." Now, if the funeral home organization was preaching the gospel *through me* when I preached a funeral, was that same funeral home also "preaching the gospel" *through* the *Jehovah's Witness* preacher when he preached? Does it also preach *through* Baptist and Methodist preachers when they preach at the funeral home's invitation? Of course not! The funeral home is a *business*. The business doesn't care whether Truth is taught, or error. It cares about its business. Like all other businesses, funeral homes must make money in order to survive. To compare a brotherhood business Bible lectureship to what is done at funeral homes is to compare the lectureship to a secular business that invites a preacher to preach for the purpose of financial gain.

3. To cite a funeral home as justification for a secular organization to arrange and conduct Bible lectureships is to define a funeral home as an evangelistic organization.
4. To cite a funeral home as justification for a secular organization to arrange and conduct Bible lectureships is to justify an organization that sponsors and promotes the teaching of a large variety of *soul-damning* doctrines!
5. Even if we were to grant that funeral home preaching is parallel to what is done by brethren, the argument only assumes the practice to be right. It offers no Scriptural defense of the practice. The argument would prove only that the actions of the one organization were just as wrong as the other.

One writer cited Paul's preaching at the Areopagus (Acts 17) as proof that such action is authorized. He wrote:

“However questions have been raised as to whether an organization separate from the local church has any right to hold a forum for the proclamation of the gospel.”

“Paul was not condemned for using the opportunity extended to him by a secular organization. The Areopagus was its own organization, foundation, or establishment which functioned separately from the local church. If the sermon before the Areopagus circumvented the local church, Paul would not have spoken or would have stood condemned.”

“Our specific study has investigated to see if a secular organization which is separate from the local church has the liberty to provide a forum for the gospel to be taught.”

The writer concludes that the preacher’s acceptance of a speaking invitation implies divine approval of an organization’s right to provide a forum for the proclamation of the gospel. I agree with the above writer that it is right to invite a person to teach the Bible. It is also right for a Bible teacher to accept such an invitation. I have no disagreement with the writer on this point. What I fear is that some people are reaching a conclusion that is unwarranted from the above writer’s premises. His language and conclusions need to be carefully considered.

Some have falsely concluded that the apostle’s acceptance of an organization’s preaching invitation constitutes his acceptance of the *organization itself*. We must not confuse an organization’s right to *invite gospel preaching* with the right of men to *form and fund human organizations for the purpose of preaching the gospel!* There is a huge difference between an organization “inviting” a man to preach, and an organization being formed and funded for the purpose of evangelism. For example, in the aforementioned article, the author argued that Paul’s acceptance of the Areopagus’ preaching invitation is proof that a human organization may organize and arrange a forum for the gospel to be taught. Actually, the only thing that is implied by Paul’s actions at the Areopagus is that men have the right to *extend* and to *accept* a preaching invitation. The actual text of Acts 17 nowhere speaks of the Areopagus organizing a Bible lectureship and “inviting” Paul to work *with* or *through* their “organization” in the “proclamation of the gospel.” Paul actually preached *against* the beliefs of the people of Athens, particularly, against the beliefs of the Stoics and Epicureans who invited him to

the Areopagus. Let us consider some things that are wrong with the “invitation” argument.

1. Accepting an organization’s invitation to preach the gospel does not constitute approval of the organization *itself*. The author of the article that I referenced above did not take his argument this far, but others have certainly done so. They have reached a conclusion that is not allowed from the stated premises. After doing so, they have obviously failed to then consider the logical consequences of their position. If accepting a preaching invitation from an organization implies automatic approval of the organization itself, then the sermons of many gospel preachers have justified the existence and function of all types of false religious organizations, from Catholic, to Mormon, to denominational, to various cults! I know of many sound gospel preachers who have spoken to various religious organizations with whom they vastly differ. These erroneous organizations “provided a forum for the proclamation of the gospel,” but the gospel was preached *to* them and *against* them, **not by them, through them or for them**. When a preacher accepts such invitations, his act of accepting the speaking invitation does not constitute approval of the religious organization that he teaches!

Paul preached against the beliefs of the Stoics and Epicureans in Acts 17. Faithful preachers take advantage of any and all opportunities to speak, provided that they are permitted to speak the whole council of God (Acts 20:26, 27). Any forum that will not allow the whole truth to be taught is an unscriptural forum. If the head of the church of Satan invited me to speak to his organization I would do it. Obviously, my preaching to that organization would not constitute authorization for that organization to exist! Nor would it mean that I was working *through* that organization. The church of Satan would have “provided a forum” for me to preach, but that satanic organization is not doing the preaching: It is being preached *against*. Preaching is authorized at every opportunity (2 Tim. 4:2), but this fact alone does not in itself authorize any particular *organization* or *organizational arrangement*. Jesus taught Satan in response to Satan’s *invitation* (Lk. 4:5-12). Satan opened the door providing a forum for the preaching of the gospel, but Christ’s teaching in no way legitimized the goals and purposes of Satan’s organization. The argument that some are making *proves and*

allows too much. They set out to defend the preaching organization of their preference, but their argument ends up legitimizing institutions that disseminate soul-damning error.

2. The argument contains a logical fallacy. There is a difference between a preaching *invitation* and a preaching *organization*. Some of those who have accepted the “invitation” argument are ignoring this difference. A preaching *invitation* is always authorized, for *preaching* is always authorized. The preaching invitation is always right, for preaching is always right. However, the *preaching invitation being right* does not necessarily mean that *those doing the inviting* are right. The Bible contains examples of *illegitimate* and *ungodly* organizations inviting men to preach. That preaching did not automatically legitimize those sinful organizations. The fact that faithful preachers responded to those invitations proves only that one is authorized to preach the gospel in any situation where he has the opportunity to preach.

Let us consider some Bible examples where an organization invited preachers to preach, and the preachers took advantage of that preaching opportunity, but their preaching did not constitute approval of the organization that provided the teaching forum:

Paul, and the Synagogues – Acts 13:5 shows that Paul had preached in the synagogues in Salamis, and when he arrived in Antioch “*he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down*” (Acts 13:14). The next verse tells us that the synagogue rulers invited Paul and the others to speak. Paul accepted the invitation. This synagogue provided a “forum for the proclamation of the gospel.” Did Paul’s acceptance of this invitation constitute approval of the synagogue *organization*? The answer is an emphatic NO. By Paul’s time as a gospel preacher, the synagogue *organization* was unscriptural, for it promoted and upheld a law and religious system that had been abolished at the cross (2 Cor. 3:13; Eph. 2:14; Col. 2:14). Paul preached *to* the people that met in the synagogues, but he did not preach *through* the synagogues. The synagogues did not *sponsor* the preaching. Though Paul was “invited” to speak at the synagogue in Antioch (Acts 13:15), and that organization “provided a forum for the preaching of the gospel,” yet it was an unscriptural organization, its members “*opposed those things that were spoken by Paul*” (Acts

13:45), and they “*raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region*” (Acts 13:50). Synagogues did not conduct Bible lectureships and invite Paul and Barnabas as speakers. By design, they were organizations that followed the Law of Moses and rejected the gospel of Christ. Synagogue members were occasionally converted *away from* the beliefs and traditions of the synagogues, but that is exactly the point! Converts did not continue under the “tutorage” of Mosaic Law – they turned to Christ (Gal. 3:25). Paul got into trouble because of his *opposition* to what synagogues taught and practiced. He would have gotten into no trouble with the synagogues had he worked *with* the synagogues, and had he spoken *for* the synagogues. That is not what he did. It is absurd for brethren to cite either the *synagogues* themselves, or the preaching *invitations* extended by those synagogues, as justification for man-made evangelistic societies and their practices today.

The Areopagus – The Stoics and Epicureans asked Paul, “*May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak?*” (Acts 17:19). Some ignore the earlier part of the verse, which says that they “*took*” Paul and “*brought him to the Areopagus,*” and they emphasize this *question*. They want to frame this as nothing more than a *preaching invitation* by the Areopagus *organization*. (Incidentally, if the “Areopagus” is an “organization,” and the Stoics and Epicureans “took” Paul to the Areopagus, then are we to conclude that the Stoics and Epicureans were *not* members of the Areopagus? Didn’t they say that *they* wanted to know what these things mean? Also, if the Areopagus is an organization, and one must rely upon secular history for his understanding of the purpose and role of the Areopagus, then shouldn’t we interpret Paul’s time before that “organization” as an *interrogation* by a criminal court? After all, Luke said that the hearers perceived Paul to be “*a proclaimer of strange deities*” (Acts 17:18), and secular accounts show that the Areopagus court tried cases like that.) Let us assume that Acts 17:19 constitutes a *preaching invitation*. And let us also assume that Luke’s “Areopagus” is an organization. If so, you have a secular *municipal* organization, made up of *pagans*, which “provided a forum for the gospel to be taught.” Why would one want to cite this example as his religious authority? Some will point out that Paul didn’t *rebuke* the organization for what they did. Well, what did they do that would have invited a rebuke from Paul? If we follow secular history, the Areopagus was a legal and judicial body. Paul certainly wouldn’t rebuke people for administering justice and keeping the peace (Rom. 13:1-4). And if we follow the text, the Stoics and Epicureans took him to a place where he could be heard by “men of

Athens.” Why would he rebuke them for such an “invitation”? As I said above, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of a preaching opportunity. The real question is, was Paul a joint *participant* with the pagans in some Areopagus-preaching program? No. Did he preach *through* that organization? No. He actually preached against the beliefs of the very men who invited him to speak! How on earth can one possibly see in this story any authority for the establishment of man-made evangelistic organizations?

The Sanhedrin Council – Peter and John had been miraculously released from prison. The high priest called together the Jewish Sanhedrin for the purpose of interrogating these men (Acts 5:21, 27). The next verse opens with a question. Peter and John responded to the question and proceeded to teach the members of the council. Here is an organization that “provided a forum for the proclamation of the gospel.” Shall we liken the Sanhedrin to modern day evangelistic organizations and edification societies? Were Peter and John comparable to modern day participants in a lectureship series? No. Verse 33 tells us that members of the council were “*furiously and took council to kill them.*” Here is an organization that *provided a forum for gospel preaching*, but rejected Christ as the Messiah, despised the gospel, and wanted to kill the gospel preachers. The preaching invitation must not be confused with the organization extending the preaching invitation.

Roman Authorities – Various elements of the Roman government provided Paul with forums for preaching the gospel (Lysias, Felix, Agrippa, Caesar, Acts 21-28). Paul’s appeal to Caesar and his subsequent associations with Roman officials allowed him to preach the gospel throughout the entire imperial guard (Phil. 1:13). The Roman government was an organization that provided forums for the gospel to be preached. However, it was also one of the most wicked organizations to ever exist. Nero and other Roman emperors enjoyed torturing and slaughtering Christians. Rome may have extended preaching invitations to the apostle Paul, *but it also killed him because of what he preached!* Let us not confuse Rome’s preaching *invitations* with that organization’s *attitude* towards the gospel. The Roman government did not constitute an evangelistic organization. It did not conduct gospel meetings and invite Paul to speak.

Conclusion

Invitations to preach are as authorized as the preaching itself. But the mere extending of a preaching invitation does not legitimize the organization that extends the invitation. An illegitimate organization might make a legitimate preaching invitation. The faithful gospel preacher will accept the invitation, but he will preach what should be preached. One might accept an invitation from the Playboy Magazine organization to write an article on pornography. The teacher's acceptance of that invitation would not constitute authorization for the Playboy organization to exist. It would remain an illegitimate, godless organization. Brethren can surely see the difference between an *invitation* to preach and the *organization* that may have extended that invitation.

Tim Haile