

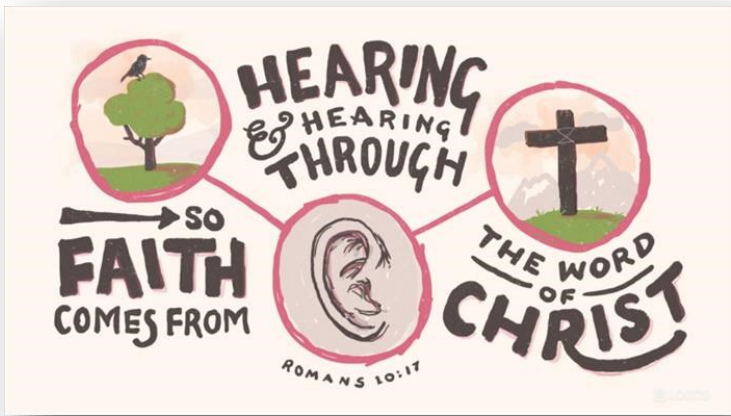
## Don't Undermine God's Word

Our responsibility as believers is not to try to convert people. No one but God's Spirit can change the human heart.

**Jeremiah 17:9** *"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*

### FAITH TO BELIEVE

We share the Truth and trust the Holy Spirit to use the words to convict the hearer affording him or her the opportunity to respond. Faith to believe comes from the Scriptures—Romans 10:17.



### MODERN METHODS

Many assume that without some gimmick, the Gospel message just won't reach people, and unless we accommodate it to the fashion of our day, we can't hope for it to be effective. Lamentably, unholy living on the part of shallow professors of Christ has rendered the church's testimony impotent. Thus modern churches feel they must plan and program for attracting unbelievers who cannot be persuaded with revealed truth, because those same people have been repelled by the hypocrisy of church members' unholy living.

## SOME SAY

There is nothing that people are so interested in as themselves, their own problems, and the way to solve them. The fact is basic. No preaching that neglects it can raise a ripple on a congregation.

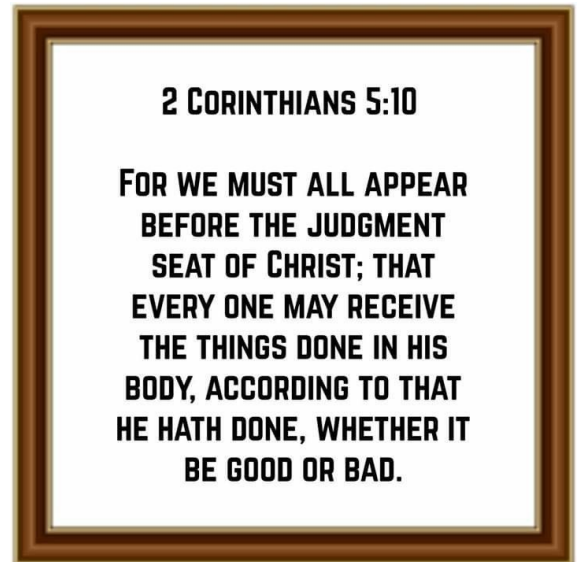
Ironically, that liberal, humanistic approach to preaching is precisely the route many who call themselves evangelical are taking today. The pastor of one large church echoes this philosophy, *"We have put a lot of time and thought into what non-churched people want from a Sunday morning service, and we have concluded that they basically want four things:*

- *Anonymity'*
- *Uncomplicated teaching,*
- *A non-threatening environment,*
- *And Contemporary relevance."*

His church is doing its best to offer what the unchurched say they are looking for. The quest for relevancy had led this church and others like it to kick aside virtually every conventional expression of worship. Sunday services are first class musical comedy drama productions, no Bible teaching or expository preaching.

## PROSTITUTING THE MINISTRY

Any pastor who follows that pattern and fails to preach the Word is prostituting the ministry. And any church that aims to entertain the unconverted has placed itself in opposition to God. *"Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God," James 4:4.* The church is supposed to confront the world. The message that God has called us to preach is not designed to make sinners comfortable. The ***fear of God*** is what should motivate us to persuade men— **2 Corinthians 5:10-11.** Many preachers today are fearful only of offending people, hence they preach an insipid message, powerless message that is in fact an offense to God.



Contrast to that trend with what we know of preaching in the early church. Paul challenged the Galatian church, saying, *"Am I now seeking the favour of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond servant of Christ," Galatians 1:10.* He wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel," Romans 1:16.*

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## PAUL CONFRONTED FELIX AND DRUSILLA

Paul confronted Felix and Drusilla, Acts 24:24-27 further defies some of the cardinal axioms of the shameful evangelism of our day. He declared God's truth to them without regard to their status, position, power or prestige—"*Therefore ....we recognise no man according to the flesh,*" **2 Corinthians 5:16**. He offered them no words of comfort, consolation, or encouragement, in fact, his message frightened Felix so much that Felix sent Paul away (**V25**). The apostle discussed three matters with Felix and Drusilla—"*Righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come,*" (**V25**). Those of course, are the very focus of the Holy Spirit's convicting ministry—**John 16:8-11**. And they would have been particularly alarming topics for Felix and Drusilla, whose debauchery was legendary throughout the Roman Empire. This did not dissuade Paul from boldly challenging them.

Remember, too, that Paul was appealing before Felix as a prisoner before a judge. Felix could have ordered Paul's release from prison. Still, the apostle did not attempt to mollycoddle or flatter him. Paul's only concern was preaching the truth to this man, whom he viewed as a sinner in need of salvation. He preferred leaving him miserable and terrified knowing his need of a Saviour rather than making him comfortable, though ignorantly on his way to hell.

## MERRY-GO-ROUND —"WORSHIP"

Worship services in many churches today are like a merry-go-round. You drop a token in the collection box, it's good for a ride. There's music and lots of motion up and down. The ride is carefully timed and seldom varies in length. Lots of good feelings are generated, and it is the one ride you can be sure will never be the least bit threatening or challenging. But though you spend the whole time feeling as if you're moving forward, you get off exactly where you got on.

## LAS VEGAS

There is seemingly no limit to what some churches will do to entertain people. I know of churches that now offer musical extravaganzas that include dancing and secular rock music, exhibitions virtually indistinguishable from Las Vegas shows. One pastor, when asked why he allowed such a performance at his church, said, "It attracts people.: That's a pragmatic approach to ministry, whatever works is thought to be acceptable.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH PRAGMATISM?

The error of pragmatism is that it regards methodologies that "work" as more important and more viable than those that are Biblical. A pragmatist is concerned primarily with whether a given practise is expedient, not necessarily whether it is in harmony with Scripture. They start with the question, "What do the unchurched want?" and builds a strategy from there, rather than asking the question, "What does Scripture teach about church ministry?" and following a Biblical pattern. The contemporary trend of pragmatism utterly ignores the Biblical priorities for the church. Church meetings are not supposed to be designed for unbelievers. According to Scripture, the church comes together for worship, fellowship, edification, and mutual encouragement within the body. (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor.16:1-2, Heb.10:24-25).

## PREACH THE WORD

The preaching of God's Word is to be the essential focal point for all corporate worship and ministry (1 Tim.6:2, 2 Tim.4:2). The emphasis should be prayerful, adoring communion with God, not entertainment or any expression of self-indulgent. Furthermore, pragmatism attacks the sufficiency of God's Word in evangelism. We don't need to market the Gospel, disguise it, tone it down, or otherwise try to make it acceptable to unbelievers. The plain Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

Walter Chantry (Christian author) correctly address the problem in his book *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* "Much of modern preaching is anaemic, with the lifeblood of God's nature absent from the message. Evangelists centre their message upon the man. Man has sinned and missed a great blessing. If man wants to retrieve his immense loss he must act thus and so. But the Gospel of Christ is very different. It begins with God and His glory. It tells men that they offended a holy God, who will by no means pass by sin. It reminds sinners that the only hope of salvation is to be found in the grace and power of this same God. Christ's Gospel sends men to beg pardon of the Holy One."

The future glories of heaven have been overshadowed by the present glitter of earth, and many Christians have sunk into a health-wealth-and-prosperity comfort zone from which only death itself or the rapture of the church would dare remove them, and even that would be an unwelcome intrusion to some. Few people long for heaven.

## THE POWER OF GOD FOR SALVATION

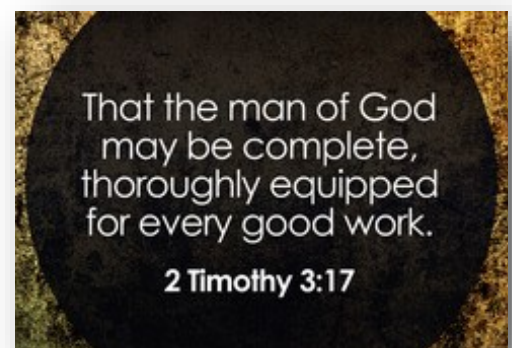
Paul was certain that God's Word itself was sufficient to provoke true saving faith in the hardest believers' hearts. He wrote, "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,*" Romans 1:16. Unfortunately, many evangelicals have moved away from that confidence in recent years.

## HOW'S YOUR SPIRITUAL DIET?

Overindulgence is a hallmark of our society. Sadly, that's true of the church as well. Many Christians are so overfed with spiritual junk food that they've lost their appetite for sound Biblical teaching. On the other extreme are those who feast on the Word but don't apply it, so they suffer from chronic spiritual lethargy and impotence.

How about you? Are you a man or woman of the Word?

No matter where you are in your spiritual growth, Scripture is sufficient to equip you for every good work—2 Tim. 3:17. If you're a Christian who isn't yet grounded in sound doctrine, you need the Word for training and spiritual growth. If you're giving place to sin in your life you need the reproofing and correcting work of the Word.



Remember, that paint in a can is not effective unless it is applied.