

Sermon Notes

9-4-11



Welcome
To The
1st Church
Of...
Entertainment?



Reflections

I was recently reading a series of articles written by pastors of various churches. Some were large, others were small, but the same question was being examined from each of their perspectives. What does God think of the church's new fascination with entertainment and media as part of its ministry and worship methods? The role of media and entertainment in the local church was addressed. There were areas of consensus, and areas of different approaches but discussion centered on what it costs to turn the church into a media show.

We live in a media saturated world. Several hours each day are spent by the average person in consumption of media in some form. Most teens today, and younger ones too, spend countless hours, wired, tuned in, interacting with, or watching some highly stimulating media format. From computers to video games and even cell phones. Many have little or no exposure to people with whom they must, or choose to, interact. For many it could approach being identified as an addiction.

Many churches have chosen to emulate the secular world's approach to "connecting" with today's culture. Sadly, many have also gone so far as to merely draw crowds to a "gospel show." As Chuck Swindoll has said in a recent book, "when the church becomes an entertainment center, biblical literacy is the first casualty." He goes on to say: "we use the (video) screens for a song or two that we don't know otherwise we're using hymnals." Chuck is not the pastor of a tiny work in an obscure village, he is, within the evangelical community, a very influential pastor and theologian. His emphasis in ministry, however, is the Word of God and being certain that it is fundamental in all aspects of the church. His use of media and technology is carefully crafted and applied in small amounts to the ministry in the church he pastors.

With the amount of technology available today, it is very tempting to incorporate it into our worship strategies. It is possible to create a convincing virtual world with the technologies of today and churches see the profound effects that it has on people. Many then try to duplicate it with "spiritual" topics which can, in effect, disembodied the gospel. When we talk on the phone, watch a video, or listen to a recording of a person, we are able to disembodied ourselves and become simply a voice or a picture, or typed text. Jesus always ministered to people, and face-

to-face. He used parables and other communication methods to teach and illustrate, but it was His touch that healed.

Often, our efforts, in the church world, to duplicate professional media, become less than powerful since our level of expertise and budget to acquire the equipment used in the media world are lacking, we only create a weak facsimile of their product. This can lead us to substitute a disembodied techno-strategy for the person-to-person ministry that Jesus employed. Though large crowds followed Him, it was not His intent to draw them. He was trying to get people to see their need of His salvation by teaching, touching, and healing them. It was His ministry to individuals that ultimately drew the crowds.

Eventually one begins to wonder, as we ponder the issue of how much technology, media, and entertainment should find its way into our ministries. What if we chose to be different from, and perhaps a vacation from, such media distractions? What if we provided a safe haven from the media flood and centered our approach on inter-personal ministry and biblically focused instruction? What if we chose to embody the gospel rather than to disembodied it with media? What if our energy and efforts were directly related to God's Word and our own obedience to what God has commanded us to do and to become? What if we reached out and touched the "hem of His garment" and then in His name touched, personally, the lives of others? No media requirement here.

We must be careful that we don't fall into the trap of measuring success with the "rulers" of measurement used by the world. While loud is not a substitute for talent in music, neither is a large crowd a measure of the success of a ministry, and technology is not a substitute for our ministry to people. If all we've done is create another "show" to consume, how will we reach them with the Gospel of Jesus, that itself divides people. Paul tells the Corinthians... *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1Corinthians 1:23-24 NKJ)* The Jews did not look for a suffering Messiah, and the Greeks were idolaters who worshipped many gods and looked for more to worship. Paul was intensely focused on making certain that Jesus was the subject of all his ministry. He related to people as people, not as an audience. His message was that all have sinned and are in need of a savior, Jesus Christ the Lord. Let's be the Church of Jesus, not the 1st Church of Entertainment. **Pastor Doug**