

Playing Church

Compiled by Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. The church is an indispensable part of the New Testament
 - 1. Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2:47
- B. Salvation is in the church
 - 1. Acts 5:14; 1Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 2Tim. 2:10
- C. Many commands given to the Christian depend on involvement in the local church for execution
 - 1. Acts 20:7; 1Cor. 16:1-2; Eph. 5:19; Heb. 10:24-25
- D. Church Builders
 - 1. Weekly calls from outreach organizations wanting to sell us a plan to increase membership: sales, gimmicks, incentives; most of which require churches to modify their doctrines and missions, which they consider secondary to the goal of building numbers
 - 2. The appeal selected determines the direction of the church

I. CASUAL

- A. Outreach Magazine: "Do you remember being dragged to church as a child? Well, things are different now. For one thing, you've grown up, but church is different too - blue jeans, live band, real talk for real people... Image is everything - or is it? (Name of church) doesn't think so. We care more about who you are than what you wear or where you've been..."
 - 1. "What if God was one of us; just a slob like one of us..." song lyrics
- B. The casual movement is making inroads in the Lord's Church.
 - 1. Walmart casual dress, especially among the women these days
 - 2. Services are more about relaxing and being yourself and having it your way and convenience
- C. The Christian is to reverently approach God - Heb. 12:28-29

II. APPEAL TO CHILDREN

- A. It is not uncommon today in many American families for the children to make many important decisions for the family. Hence, professional marketers are now appealing to children.
 - 1. "...Come enjoy games, crafts, music, drama and great Bible-based activities. The two week program also includes a trip to Chuck E. Cheese, a camp-out, and a musical/drama presentation starring YOUR KIDS!" And your parents can come to."
- B. Jesus discouraged those who followed him for the wrong reasons
 - 1. John 6:26-27
 - 2. Religion today often appeals to the selfish "me generation" by offering fun and games. When children are targeted, what kind of attitudes and concepts do you think they will have of "church" as adults?
 - 3. Deut. 6:6-9; Eph. 6:4

III. THE NEW CHURCH

- A. It should now be obvious to the most undiscerning that religion is undergoing great change in America. The change, alas, is basically centered around the philosophy of "give me, entertain me, and satisfy my every whim."
 - 1. "A new kind of church! If hard pews, boring sermons and rusty hymns have zapped your interest in church, then you've been waiting for (your church's name supplied). You'll find electric music, sizzling drama, powerful messages and high-voltage programs for everyone. A new kind of church - shocking, isn't it?"
- B. Such an appeal for a "new church" is radically different from the simple worship and mission of the First Century church
 - 1. Eph. 5:19; John 4:24

IV. NO EMPHASIS ON RESPONSIBILITY

- A. Man cannot of his own merit save himself - Titus 3:5
 - 1. However, to access God's saving grace, man must respond to the requirements of God's will - James 2:14-26
- B. "If we could get to heaven by being good people, then Jesus wouldn't have needed to die. Now I'm not working my way to heaven and hoping for the best"
 - 1. No, we cannot "work our way to heaven," but we must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" - Phil. 2:12

V. UNCONDITIONAL ACCEPTANCE

- A. "These Christians I met blew my mind... They didn't even seem to notice the way I looked on the outside. I expected judgment, but what I got was acceptance. I know now they accept me because God accepts me. Don't get me wrong, I haven't traded in my tattoos for a tie or anything. But that doesn't really matter - I'm accepted just the way I am."
 - 1. Not advocating that the Lord's Church is selective, but I am condemning those who market Christianity by promising accepting in one's sins
- B. More and more, religion today is changing to fit society rather than requiring man to change to comply with God's requirements. 2Tim. 4:2-4

VI. POSITIVE MESSAGE

A. "You won't feel like you've been sentenced to prison when you visit _____. We are a church for people who have given up on the traditional church but not on God. You'll find energetic music, exciting dramas, great kids' and teen programs, and real-life messages. So get rid of that ball and chain and come see how much church has changed." (This impact card has a picture of a man in a prison suit with a ball and chain.) Another similar appealing card reads: If in the past the guilt-ridden, hypocritical church experience has sent you running, come check out _____. We're out to change the way you think about church. You'll find upbeat music, positive messages and genuine people....We won't 'scold' you, 'judge' you or 'pick-pocket' you...."

- B. Too many have come to view the preacher as simply a public relations man whose job it is to make the audience feel good about themselves and the gospel as a pep talk. When people become weak and selfish, they want "smooth things" taught them and the people become "worthless" because they have no challenge to repent of their sins and improve their lives
 - 1. Isa. 30:10; Jer. 23:16-17

VII. FUN AND FROLIC

- A. When many think of worship and religion today, they think in terms of "where is the party and the food?"
 - 1. "It's party time! Join us at North Park Church...., we are hosting a free BBQ and community carnival and, for the adults, a special concert. We'll close the day with a short celebration service featuring a message from an NFL Pro linebacker and a special puppet show for the kids. Please join us for this fun and exciting day...."
- B. The church Jesus built never engaged in the social, secular, and carnal gospel that is offered by these church marketers. These tactics are working because it is appealing to the carnal and base desires of the lost and worldly.
 - 1. Community Churches based on unity in diversity are prospering. They are the primary creators and purveyors of these appeals

Conclusion:

- A. The appeal of the Lord's Church:

"You are cordially invited to hear the gospel preached in its ancient purity, simplicity, and relevancy. Come learn of sin and how to contact the forgiving blood of Jesus. The Lord's Church seeks only to worship God in spirit and in truth and to engage in the acts of worship that please and honor God. The music will be congregational, spiritual, and vocal only, just as it was rendered in the First Century Church. The atmosphere will reverence God and be conducive to the reverent worship of the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. Following the service, we will be here to answer any questions about our teaching and further explore the teaching of God's authoritative book, the Bible.
- B. 2Cor. 4:2
- C. Do you see the difference in the appeal? What is your view of the church?