

who fell asleep during that sermon. I contend that Paul's preaching would not be welcome in a vast majority of churches today. Not only did he not engage in sensationalism and comedy to keep his audiences pumped up; but he also condemned sin wherever he found it.

Interest in sermons only comes to those who are truly interested in the subject material being discussed. When we need a constant barrage of comedy and cheerleading to keep our interest we declare a deficiency in our own spiritual-mindedness.

Conclusion...

The Lord's church is not welcome among many who claim to be following the Lord. It does not have the social elements that they crave. Churches that have the social elements craved by the masses is not the Lord's church. The church of Jesus Christ retains its identity only as it follows the Lord by which she is named.

NEWSWORTHY NOTES:

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THE CHURCH WHERE PAUL PREACHED

by Bob Pulliam

You know what's popular in religion today. How would it compare to the churches where the apostle Paul did his work? The common notion is that "the church I go to isn't much different than what they had when Paul was alive." Let's see if that is true...

Popular Churches Today...

What is popular in churches today? Now I know there are a lot of little things involved, but what makes them really popular? I've heard the usual list of things that people are looking for when they shop around. Here's a little list:

LIVELY SERVICES
NURSERY FACILITIES

YOUTH PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES
INSPIRATIONAL SERMONS

Now it is important that we define what is meant by each item in this list. Lively services refers to popular toe-tapping music that is performed as if in a show, with a constant flow of events intended to raise money, entertain the youth, and lure the community. Youth programs refer to basketball, soccer, camp-outs, eating halls and regular "church dinners", etc. All expected to be sponsored by the church. Nursery facilities is sometimes referred to as "children's church", and means baby sitting services. Inspirational sermons refers to lessons that have no lesson other than what might be applied in a general way to one's life. There isn't a

great deal of mention of sin, or the need to repent. This makes people feel bad.

The above items have been called the social gospel, because they are aimed at "ministering" to the "whole man". Rather than just preach at people, the social gospel is meant to reach them by providing for every other aspect of their lives.

Where Paul Preached...

Paul was an apostle of the Lord who traveled about taking the good news abroad. Although he did not work exclusively with one church, he was consistent in word and action so that all could be considered as if one. With that in mind, let's take a look at the ancient church:

LIVELY SERVICES... There is nothing wrong with "lively services" if they do not overstep scriptural bounds. Worship to God must be in "spirit and **truth**" (Jn 4:24). Worship is vain when we teach as doctrines the commandments of men (Mt 15:9). Many gimmicks have gone into religious services under the banner "it feels good". Lighting a candle and holding it does not bring one closer to God, no matter how the feelings may indicate otherwise. Being close to God is not indicated by "feeling". As James wrote, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (Jms 4:8). Drawing near to God consists of forgiveness and sanctification.

Now if all of this isn't enough, look around at all of the religious groups that **feel** close to God. Would you believe the Jehovah's Witness to be close to God?... Even though he **feels** close to God? What about the Mormon? He **feels** close to God!

Now contrast all of this with the ancient church. In that day, all things were to be done in an orderly manner (I Cor 14:40). Jumping up and shouting spontaneously while another was speaking was condemned by Paul (I Cor 14:30-33). It may be lively, but it leads to confusion. The emphasis on religious music today is its entertainment value. Not so where Paul preached. "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," (Eph 5:19). The words were of supreme importance as they conveyed the sentiment of the heart. Paul also indicated this when he wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col 3:16) The job of playing the piano or organ in so many churches today is a task of great importance. According to God's word, they actually offer nothing of scriptural value to

worshipping God. I believe I would stop engaging in such work with such a realization as that!

YOUTH PROGRAMS AND FACILITIES... Nothing would be wrong with these if they simply involved teaching God's word, and molding minds and attitudes to obey God. This is not what people have in mind when they speak of "Youth Programs". Gymnasiums and fellowship halls; constant parties and games; these are the things that make a successful youth program in the religious world today!

Now think for a moment about the church you can read about in the Bible. Where is its youth programs and facilities? Jesus had the perfect opportunity to teach regarding the fellowship hall in John 6:26-29. He had a hungry crowd, wanting Him to feed them; but instead He rebuked them! Paul had a great opportunity to sanction the gymnasium in I Timothy 4:8. Instead he wrote, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things,..."

Note the following observation by one who promoted the "youth program" approach:

"We thought, 'Get 'em to the church and have a party (if they're at church, at least they're not out partying someplace else. So we've done our job.' But the problem was, Ruhlman (John Ruhlman, high-school pastor at Shadow Mountain Community Church, El Cajon, California) says, they were coming to church to be entertained, and they were going home - entertained. 'They endured the message'"

(Christianity Today [February 3, 1997] p21)

They "endured the message". Not a very promising outcome for something intended to set the world on fire!

NURSERY FACILITIES... There is nothing wrong with providing a separate room for parents to train their children at services; but that is not what is sought. It is usually called "children's church", and some of our own brethren have taken up this practice.

I first must ask, "what is the church?" For these people it is just a gathering of people, and so a gathering of children must be children's church. The only people in the Bible who were ever in the church were adults who had believed and obeyed the gospel. When we call a day-care service "children's church" we betray our ignorance in biblical matters.

INSPIRATIONAL SERMONS... I wonder how inspirational people today would consider Paul's sermon from Acts 20:7. In verse nine we read of Eutyclus