

What Does Your Church Look Like?

For at least a couple of decades, denominational churches have pushed their "youth ministries" to the point that they basically resemble a rock concert. Darkened stages, lasers, dry ice, and rock music betray the "market-driven" approach that is ironically pushing their youth out the door. The problem is "preference." "Market-driven youth ministry" gives young people a youth group that looks like them, does activities they prefer, sings songs they like, and preaches on subjects they are interested in. It is a program of preference.

The generation of teens and 20-year-olds has been referred to "the overindulged Generation." They ask for more and more, and society gives it to them. More and more, the power of God, contained in the gospel (Romans 1:16), is substituted for a market-driven experience. In an effort to give children and parents something "attractive" and "relevant," denominations have embraced novel new methods that have dramatically affected their churches.

Because of the market-driven movement, "big-box" churches exist in most cities (our is next door). What is their Sunday like? It starts in the coffee house, (which is the foyer). It continues in the concert hall (which is the worship assembly), and it is brought to a head in the comedy club (which is the sermon).

Giving people what they "prefer" is a road that once you go down, has no end. There is an old principle: "What you win them with, you win them to." All these churches that have taken this path can look at their "youth groups" and see what their congregation is going to be like in 15 years. From what I have seen, that would not be a comforting thought.

What might churches do instead? The opposite of giving people what they want is to give them what they need. The beauty is that the Bible already knows how to do this. The pure doctrine of Christ says that man's greatest need is salvation from the universal scourge of sin (Romans 3:23). People's obedience to Jesus through baptism saves them from their sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). In the first century, once people obeyed, they went out to the highways and byways, loving, teaching, and serving the lost. In those days, Christians taught the gospel with boldness, just like Paul spoke of in Romans 1:16. Furthermore, they served the poor, the widows, and the orphans, and the world noticed.

We cannot allow ourselves to be pulled into the culture-driven goals of denominational churches. We have to forget the culture-centered models and simply get back to the ancient goals of scriptural authority, zealous teaching, and fervent service. This is what will convert our children and help them grow in Christ.

The commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 was intended to make disciples. Conscientious Christians want to teach and convert their children and other children to be Christians for life, not just for high school. There is no telling how many millions of dollars have been spent among denominational churches in "youth ministry" with no real spiritual results other than mere entertainment. I pray that conservative brethren will not go down the same path with similar results. We at the Loop 287 Church of Christ are trying to do just like the apostles did in the first century: make disciples of Christ by preaching the gospel. It can accomplish the genuine results of changing the heart and winning souls to Christ.

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