

Preacher's Pen points

A Lesson from the Church Mail Box

I thought you might be interested in a typical day of church mail. Each day as I go to the church mail box I am prepared for a barrage of offers of all kinds. Today I received among other things a promotion for a pastor's credit card, an offer to purchase 20 anthems for a church choir, an ad to buy a 120 foot long "awesome obstacle course" for children's play, an offer to enroll in a course for business-building, a promotion from a fund-raising company urging us to sell cutlery, an invitation to attend the ministry of a illusionist who supposedly preaches the gospel while doing death-defying stunts, a sales brochure from a computer company, and an invitation to attend an open house to learn about an income tax preparation course—all of that in just one day!

Would Today's Churches Be Interested?

It seems pretty obvious that these vendors thought their ads would be attractive to some of the churches they sent these promotions to; otherwise they would not have wasted a lot of money on slick ads and postage. I began to wonder how other churches might respond to these promotions. And the sad reality is that some churches seem to buy into about anything that comes down the pike. Motivated by a philosophy that says "*the end justifies the means*" their approach is to offer to the unbelieving world whatever will get them in the church's front doors. And so promotions of this kind would probably have a number of takers. For example, churches need money, so why not try selling cutlery to raise funds for the church's goals? And perhaps another would reason, "We surely need to attract young people. Let's buy that 120 foot long obstacle course for our fall festival. That will bring the kids out; and maybe we can persuade the parents to start bring-

ing them to church." And perhaps some church would appreciate the opportunity to buy choir music to stir the emotions of the service attendees. Maybe some church would consider taking a load of its young people to see FX hoping that among the entertaining stunts the "gospel" would be preached and someone would be "saved".

Would the NT Church Have Been Interested?

Then I wondered how such offers might have been received by a NT congregation. Would any of these promotions have resonated with the people whose mission was to following the leading of the Holy Spirit as He spoke the words of Christ through the apostles? Those congregations appear to have had a totally different approach. They didn't seem interested in entertaining unbelievers; instead, "*they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's doctrine and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer*" (Ac. 2:42). And there's not the slightest evidence that they considered providing physical attractions as lures to bring in a crowd the right way to evangelize a community. Instead they "*went everywhere preaching the word*" (Ac. 8:4). Instead of asking unbelievers to buy products, they would have ask the members who believed to fund the work of the church (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

An Important Lesson

It seems to me that if we want to practice Christianity as Jesus and His apostles taught it there would be no place for such "promotions". I could see little in this pile of paper that would help us follow the example of churches led by the apostles of Christ. So with a sigh I sent the whole pile to its proper place—"the round file!"

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