

A Fog in the Pews

Dr. Howard Hendricks, of the Dallas Theological Seminary, has said, “A mist in the pulpit puts a fog in the pews.” Something dreadful is happening in the pulpits of many churches across our land. A compromise is crippling the commitment of many people who sit in church services each Sunday. The erosion it is causing in the body of Christ is costly. We take a hard look at this fearful reality in today’s Templates of Truth.

Paul testified to the church at Colossae that he *was made a minister...that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God* (Colossians 1:25). There was probably not another person in Christian history more faithful and obedient to his call than the Apostle Paul. Without apology or compromise, Paul tenaciously preached God’s Word and exhorted every preacher, believer and church he came in contact with to do the same. He was particularly concerned about churches that had been influenced and impacted by those who questioned, challenged and offered alternative views to the teachings of Scripture. I often wonder about the temper of Paul’s letters if he were writing to many preachers and churches in 2011.

I have recently read Chuck Swindoll’s new book, *The Church Awakening* (Faith Words, 2010). In the insight and honesty with which few can render as well as Dr. Swindoll, the book explains the drift of the church into postmodernism and the slow, silent, & subtle erosion that has come to her as a result. I highly recommend its reading to every believer, church leader and minister today. I caution you, however, that it is not necessarily an enjoyable read.

To explain all the dynamics of the drift is complex and complicated. We have invested thousands of hours and dollars into researching the mindset & expectations of today’s unchurched American, more positively identified by many as a “seeker.” Noting all the characteristics that shape the perspectives & desires of this demographic, many have tailored church & ministry to attract that mindset and fill their sanctuaries. Such churches are deemed either a “seeker-friendly” church or an “emerging” church. In many places, what has been changed & altered is drastic and significant, and what is emerging is of equal concern. Among them, and to a most unfortunate degree, is the preaching of God’s Word from the pulpit (at least in churches that still have a pulpit). The churches where this has occurred may be amassing thousands in attendance, but the error of this compromise has yet to be fully realized.

Studies have determined that “seekers” don’t like to be made to feel uncomfortable with the presentation of Biblical commands. They don’t want to hear sermons that cause them to feel guilty over their lifestyle choices & adopted values & patterns of behavior. They tend to reject an insistence to absolutes and favor a more moderated, liberal approach to Scriptural principles and ideals. So in many of these churches, the “edge” is taken off of the “two-edged sword” and the teaching of God’s Word is minimized and downplayed so that it is not taken so offensively. Not much is preached about sin & judgment, the holiness of God or the importance of obedience. Expository preaching has been replaced with short inspirational homilies, positive-thinking

talks or motivational speeches that focus more on human relationships, success in the business world or how to make your life more satisfying. These churches avoid the hard teaching of Scripture on matters of repentance and the cost of discipleship, choosing instead to focus on God's grace and how easy it is to become a believer. To use an old pun, Paul would "turn over in his grave" to see how many churches today adulterate the integrity of God's Word!

Jesus gave the proven formula for reaching people – *if I be lifted up...I will draw all men to Myself* (John 12:32). Even though Jesus was referring literally to His crucifixion & death, He was referring figuratively to all that His death represents – the life-changing message of the Gospel. How are people drawn to Him? – *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit* (I Corinthians 12:3), because it is the Holy Spirit *who convicts the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment* (John 16:8). For those divine measures to work, God needs men in the pulpit who are faithful to preach the uncompromised truth of His Word – *how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?* (Romans 10:14). Godly men like Charles Stanley, the late Adrian Rogers, John MacArthur, David Jeremiah and Chuck Swindoll are blazing examples of how this method still works as their churches have been ranked among America's largest and strongest for decades.

The pulpit is not an orthodox structure that causes a relational barrier between people and pastor (which is why many have removed it). It is there to remind us of the purpose and priority of corporate worship – the preaching of God's Word. All that we do in worship centers around, points to and effectively supports the proclamation of God's absolute Truth. Nothing should distract from that divinely-ordered objective, whether it be music, lights, technology, facility esthetics or dress. When the presentation of the Word of God is compromised in quantity or substance, its effects are also minimized. Sermonettes produce Christianettes. There may be thousands in the pews, but evidence is revealing that many of those are false converts and malnourished Christians whose lives are marked with spiritual immaturity, Biblical illiteracy and moral deficiency. That is not the picture of the church of the New Testament.

Jerry Clower would often tell about a plague that hung on the wall of his office. In his characteristic vernacular, he would say what it said – "The main-most thang, is to make fer sure that the main-most thang is the the main-most thang!" The uncompromised preaching & teaching of God's Word is the "main-most thang" that church is about and that effectively reaches all people. I believe God is calling men back to the faithfulness of solid Biblical preaching in the pulpits across America. It is the only way to lift the fog that has settled in too many pews.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.