



"The Church Of What's Happening Now"

Comedian, Flip Wilson, used to do a satirical skit about religion called, **"The Church Of What's Happening Now"**.

In thinking about it, I have wondered if that is not what some of us are trying to make of the church - "The church of what's happening now."

Are we not going overboard in trying to make the ancient Biblical religion relevant and acceptable to the contemporary scene? The idea being that the needs and problems at this place and time cannot be met by the ancient gospel - unless we retune it to the turning fork of the contemporary sound. The assumption being that those we are trying to reach today, given the pressures and advances of modern living, must be different from those ancient men living in less complex times. Or, that the message that ancient man found perfectly adequate for his needs cannot suit the needs of this modern age. Or, that the way outlined in the New Testament suited that people, in that time, in that part of the world - but we must adapt it to fit a different people, at a different time, and in a different part of the world. Or, that since modern man is far more interested in the "here and now" than he is in a "hereafter" - then we must rearrange the Bible's teaching to fit that shift in interest.

The fact of the matter is that the needs and problems, that the gospel is designed to meet and solve, do not change with times, locations and cultures. While the social, physical, and other problems and aspirations may vary - the spiritual needs remain constant.

The gospel, as it was, with the emphasis where it placed it, preached as it was, is relevant to the spiritual needs of all men everywhere of any age - just as it was in the first century.

Sin is the same everywhere, for everyone at any time. It is transgression of God's law. (1 John 3:4). One who has transgressed God's law in 1 A.D. or 1984 A.D., at age 15 or 75, in Judea or Juneau has the same problem -- he has sinned and needs the same forgiveness. The ancient gospel tells him how to get it. As a Christian, he needs to worship and work in the Lord's kingdom. One cannot fulfill that need any better than doing just what New Testament Christians did - in fact, if he does otherwise his worship and work is vain (Mt. 15:9; Mt. 7:21-23).

In my judgment, this over emphasis upon making the gospel relevant to the contemporary scene has led to practices and an emphasis that, to say the least, cheapens the priceless gospel of Christ.

There seems to be the notion that is taking hold in many cases, that if we find a scene where the gospel, in its ancient form, is not getting through and people do not find it "meaningful" or "helpful" to their circumstances that it is up to us to repackage it so that it will be more in tune with the contemporary scene. I saw a young man, son of famous parents, on TV this week promoting the church of which he is a member as being relevant to the young people of today. You see, it's worship has a rock and roll beat!

Preachers sometimes, in their

efforts to appeal to young people, make spectacles of themselves trying to keep up with and conform to the latest fads of teens in dress, language, styles, etc. and punctuating their preaching with all the latest slang - all in the name of reaching out to teenagers. Never mind that such antics, while maybe appealing to a few immature teens (many are turned off by it), creates a bad taste in the mouths of the more thoughtful and mature in and out of the church.

I am interested in young people. But that does not mean that I have to act like a forty-five year old going on fifteen in order influence them with the gospel. Or that I have to try to turn the whole church into a youth-oriented organization. Believe it or not, I was once a teenager, subject to most of the teen fads of my day - even weird hair cuts. And listened such cultured songs as "R-A-G-G, M-O-P-P - Rag Mop!" Most fads were, though somewhat childish to me now, rather innocent. Some, of which I have long since repented, were not so innocent. I was still in my teens when I began preaching. The point of telling all of this? The two gospel preachers that had the most positive influence upon life during those years were mature men (I think one was even past 30 at the time) - and they acted their age. I believe that one of the reasons that I, to this hour, feel such a closeness to these men (both of whom are still living and active) is because that, while their door was always ajar to me, their hands outstretched, and their understanding and patience always apparent; they

never embarrassed me or insulted my intelligence with antics more befitting my peer group than theirs. I still have not grown to their stature of general and spiritual maturity, but I am thankful that they did not yield to the pressure to just become "one of the boys" and rob me of the image of maturity that I needed to seek to attain. Nor did they try to get the church there to be so youth-oriented that consideration for young people virtually became the controlling force in all the decisions and planning of the leadership. Yet, for some strange reason, I never felt neglected or left out or put down nor that I was some kind of special problem deserving special attention. On the contrary, I felt accepted and grateful to have fellowship with others without regard to age. I was able to take part in "public parts", even preaching on occasion, right along with the elderly and middleaged - without feeling that it was just because I was young but because I was a Christian.

Instead, I am seeing more and more older preachers trying to identify with teenagers by acting and looking as teenish as possible (With some there is not enough Grecian Formula in Alabama to do the job) and more and more brethren who set the policies in congregations who want it so. It's odd that I never see them donning walking canes and hearing aids so as to be better identified with elderly. You know, they need to be understood, reached and otherwise "related to", too. But, will not such identification with teens do more to save our teenagers? Not if what some teenagers have told me is so - and some teenagers still talk with this old moss back. While many enjoy their company, much in the same way they do that of their peers, most that have talked with me see them as phoney as a three dollar bill and/or rather immature.

In an effort to justify the idea that we need to adjust our lives, appearance and habits

"Older brethren need to wake up. The way to influence teenagers with the gospel is not to revert to childish things that we should have outgrown (cf. 1 Cor. 13:11), but set an example of maturity before them - at the same time being patient with their 'growing pains'."

so as to, as close as possible, become a mirror image of those that we are trying to reach with the gospel (thus, in touch with "what's happening now") - the apostle Paul is quoted: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor. 9:22). So, in the 60's some young men who took a special interest in the hippies virtually became hippies to win hippies. They looked, talked and acted the part - with the exception of actually getting into the drugs or immorality associated with the movement. Now, is that really what Paul had in mind. Is the "all things", "all men", and "all means" not governed by the context - as such expression usually are. Paul was interested in saving idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, etc. Did he act, talk, and otherwise appear like this kind of people - just stopping short of actual participation in their acts? If not, then the "alls" must be limited. The context shows that he was talking about foregoing some liberties that the gospel granted him - but did not require of him - at times and places and under circumstances that would be offensive to those he was trying to reach. It is nothing to do with becoming sloppy, crude and tasteless in order to conform to the norm of some that we might be trying to reach with the gospel. I have known some men who were clean cut, well spoken (they used the best grammar they knew) and in general showed good taste to take an interest in saving

a certain people in a certain area where such was not the norm. It is commendable that such an interest is taken. The people in that place and those conditions are subjects of the gospel and fall under our obligations to the "great commission". Some of these men have been quite effective - and they are still clean cut, well spoken and mannered with good taste. But, I have known of others who, after a very short time, became sloppy in their appearance, careless in their habits and crude (bordering on rude) in their language. They are defended and often applauded by themselves and their supporters for their willingness to "become all things to all men". (Or, to get in step with the "what's happening now" scene). I just don't believe that I need to drag the gospel or myself, as one who represents it, down to the gutter level just because it might be more appealing to some people.

I want to save even the skid-row bum, but I do not believe that in order to get the gospel to him that I have to learn to dress like, talk like and otherwise act like a bum. I can talk with him about what the Bible teaches about sin, salvation and the Lord's kingdom, nurture him along in the faith - all in simple language that he can understand and still maintain a dignity of appearance and decorum befitting a messenger of the glorious gospel of Christ.

The "counseling" craze is more evidence of the desire to bring the church more into line with "what's happening now".

It is not enough any more for preachers to simply be preachers. They must know the latest "counseling" techniques. It's not unusual for churches to advertise their counseling programs. Nor is it unusual for local preachers to think of themselves more as counselors than anything else. This is an outgrowth of the idea that modern man's problems are so complex, made so by our complex society, that we must have specialized trained counselors to deal with

it. It is no longer enough to simply know what the Bible says about a matter and point a person to the passages that bear on his or her problem at hand and expect simple obedience to it! A person must first be psychoanalyzed (to see who didn't love him to cause him to be in this mess), and given a scientific solution to fit his individual need in our complex times! So, preachers and churches are putting more and more emphasis upon scientifically and professionally trained youth, marriage, and social counseling to solve the problems that brethren have created for themselves rather than emphasizing what the Bible says about the matter - pointing it out - and expecting people to comply with it. Thus, more and more emphasis is given to a preacher's psychological training and less and less to his knowledge of the Book and ability to teach it (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 3:14-17; 4:1-5).

It seems almost archaic, to some, to simply tell young Christians, as Paul did Timothy, to flee youthful lusts and expect that to suffice. Or, to simply tell people with marital problems what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage. Or what the Bible teaches about the mutual obligations in marriage and expect them find a way to conform to that or face the consequences. Yet, that is exactly what gospel preachers should be doing. Brethren, what really meets the greatest need of modern man, is declaring "all the counsel of God" and less socially oriented professional counseling coming from what should be the preachers study - where he ought to be doing just that - studying and teaching what he has studied. Telling people what the Bible promises for obedience and threatens for disobedience. A back woods preacher with a King James Bible, who never saw a psychology book, much less read one, can be just as effective in this work - if he is dealing with people who want to do the Lord's will. To those who

do not want to do His will, all the "counseling" in the world will not make them right with God.

Likewise, it seems almost archaic to expect folks to keep an interest in the church without some kind of socially-oriented program geared to their particular needs and age group. A church is simply not in tune with "what's happening now" without a youth program (complete with it's "minister"), a seniors program, a singles program, etc. Preachers are expected to spend a large portion of their time in thinking up ways and activities that will "minister" to each special group. We have had folks visit with us and ask about our "youth program" and when told that it was nothing special - that our youth received about the same attention that all other members received - they kept shopping around. One wonders how the New Testament church ever got off the ground had any lasting influence without these special-interest programs.

But, what about our youth? Do we not care about their needs? What about our "singles"? Are we insensitive to their problems? What about our elderly? Do we not know that they have special problems? We certainly do know and care. Just as we care about the needs and problems of all our brethren. It is just that the needs that the church needs to concern itself with (spiritual needs), are needs that are not peculiar to any special group. Young people sin. Old people sin. Young people avoid sin by applying what the Bible tells a Christian to be and do. Old people do the same. God's law of pardon is the same for all ages and classifications of people. The responsibilities of being a Christian are basically the same for all. The Bible does tell of a God of teens, a God of Middle Aged, a God of the Elderly with worship tailored to each group. There is not one worship for a young person and another for his grandpa nor one set of

"good works" for him and another for his dad. There is not a code of conduct for each of the many ways that people in the church might be classified. Our young people, in keeping with their ability, take part in the same program of work and worship that all of his brothers and sisters in the congregation do - regardless to their chronological age. If a young person sins against God, he is expected to repent and be restored - just the same as his eighty year old brother is expected to do. We find instructions for him in the same verses that we find them for any other person who has sinned. As individual Christians, we should be aware of and provide for the social and other temporal needs of all ages - especially those for whom we are particularly responsible and have special needs. But that is not the role of the church.

Another attempt to bring the church into line with "what's happening now" is the recent rash of translations - and brethren's eagerness to accept them. Now, don't start linking me to the back woods preacher who thought that Paul carried the King James Version in his back pocket. I am for anything that will make God's word better understood by anyone. I have given over 30 years of my life trying to improve my own and others' understanding of the Bible. I even use a different translation than I did when I first began preaching. But, I must sound a word of caution. I am seeing too many brethren all too eager to accept any "translation" that makes more sense to them or that is in more contemporary in its words and expressions - without ever questioning the accuracy of the translation or the credentials of the translators. Many of the recent translations are nothing more than paraphrases. Others openly admit that it was not their purpose to stick literally to the original text. Some were done by those who had no faith in divine inspiration. Some are obviously slanted toward a

sectarian school of thought. It does not matter how relevant a translation may seem or how easy it words to understand - if it does accurately give the meaning of the words used by the ancient inspired writers it is not relevant to our needs. One will not go wrong in staying with the King James or some later revisions of it (we should remember that the popular edition that we have used all of our lives was a revision of the earlier King James Bible) such as the American Standard of 1901 or the more recent "New King James" (which is, as far as I'm able to determine, essentially the same as the old King James without its archaisms). These have stood the test of time and conservative scholarship. Even those who dislike these for their so called awkward language seldom find room to criticize their accuracy to the original text - only that the mode of expression is not in tune with modern language. I am not so sure that they are that much out of touch with today's language, especially the later revisions - but even so one can understand them with a good dictionary. Many of the others should at least be held in suspect.

Yes, the gospel and the church - just as it is given to us by the ancient inspired writers - is adequate to our spiritual needs today. Instead of following the trends of denominational churches and adjusting to the whims of a carnally minded society that knows not what its real needs are and making it "The church of what's happening **now**" we had better get in tune with "the church of what was happening **then**."
-- Editor.

"Of Truth and Soberness"

Lowell Blasingame

When Paul made his defence before Agrippa, Festus was so moved by what Paul said that he cried out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. To this Paul replied, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness," (Acts 26:24-25)

To Festus, the words of Paul were those of man who was a fanatic, a man who had worked himself into a rage or frenzy. This Paul denies and declares that his are the words of truth and a self-controlled mind.

Words of truth and soberness are often mistaken for those of extremists, legalists, factionists, etc. We're not saying that every crackpot who mounts a soapbox and begins to shout against a certain course is speaking words of truth and soberness. But, on the other hand, neither is a man a crackpot because he opposes and exposes a course that may be being followed by the majority.

The point is that each man's words deserve being weighed on their individual merit and not another's assessment of them. Our eyes may sometimes be blinded to truth through our failure to do so. Present conditions in the Lord's church afford an excellent example of this.

Back as far as fifteen and twenty years ago some of us began to warn that ancient landmarks were being moved and that the Ship of Zion was beginning to drift. The adoption of denominational nomenclature, the use of entertainment and pro-

motional projects to draw a crowd and changes being made in the organizational structure of the church were marked by many as those of extremists, legalists, and factionists while we were quarantined as "anti" brethren and denied the right to preach in many churches.

Today the inroads of liberalism are so great within the church that many of those who twenty years ago were labeling and quarantining are now sounding the same cries of danger which they once were condemning. If the matter were not so serious, it would be humorous!

We do not encourage one to believe every word that he hears or reads. We recognize the sacred duty that man has to try spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1). What we do encourage is that a man give unbiased consideration to what another says before marking his words as those of a fanatic.

It just could be possible that what he is saying are "words of truth and soberness."

SERVICES

Sunday:

Bible Study...9:45 A.M.

Worship...10:45 A.M.

Worship...6:00 P.M.

Wednesday:

Bible Class...10:00 A.M.

Bible Study...7:30 P.M.

Our Next Gospel Meeting

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Irvin Lee

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