

What Kind of Church?

A woman called recently, indicating she and her husband had just moved to town and were looking for a church to identify with. She asked if we had an attended nursery for her two-year-old. When I told her we did not, she thanked me and hung up.

I have thought a lot about what that woman did not ask. She did not ask if we had spirited singing. She did not want to know whether we had simple, truthful preaching. She expressed no interest in whether we had faithful overseers to watch for her soul. She did not inquire about our Bible study program, nor did she seem anxious to see what opportunities for work in the Lord's cause might be available. Apparently these things were not nearly as important as someone to relieve her maternal responsibilities during the worship hour.

Another woman told me recently, "I don't like a church that tells me what to do. It's none of their business." I agree that churches have no right to make their own rules. However, we do have a God-given obligation to uphold the truth (1 Tim. 3:15) and expose sin and error (Eph. 5:11). I confess that I do not know how to preach repentance without exposing sin and warning people to turn from it.

What kind of church do you like? What features are important to you? A dynamic speaker, special activities for the kids, recreational programs, physical facilities, location, family ties, and a host of other things have been given as reasons for choosing a particular church. Whatever your taste, there is likely a church to suit. However, you should be asking another question: What kind of church does God like? He does not like them all. Some are so disgusting He spits them out (read Revelation 2 and 3, and notice that the rejected ones include some that are conservative in belief).

The only assurance of God's approval anyone can have is what He says in His revealed word. Will you submit your will to God's and become a member of the church of His choice?

- by Frank Himmel

What's Happening To Our Young People?

One doesn't have to read statistics from a professionally conducted census to know that many young people who are "raised in the church" are being lost to the cause of Christ. What's happening to them?

Permissiveness is happening to youth. In many instances, parents have abdicated their God-given role. They set no firm guidelines, have no definite rules of the house and often allow themselves to be manipulated. Parents are often literally afraid to have firm rules, afraid of the child rebelling. They don't know that love is not some kind of namby-pamby attitude, but that there must be a certain kind of toughness to love, amply shown in the book of Proverbs. It doesn't mean being roguish, tyrannical, or unmerciful in the demands it makes. But youth need guidance. They need someone to tell them "how far," some "cans" and "cant's," with good sound "why's." And, in some instances, the "why" may be simply "because I said so."

Work is happening to youth. In many instances young people are pushed and shoved into the "job market" without any consideration as to how the job will interfere with their worship, study, or the influences they will face. None of us want our children to grow up to be lazy good-for-nothings. We want them to "learn the value of a dollar," to know that, at least for most of us, "money doesn't grow on trees." But often that part-time job, which may be taking far too much of their time, is during hours of worship on the Lord's Day or during mid-week Bible study and every night of a gospel meeting. And then the parents, having allowed, maybe even encouraged it, or in some instances demanded it, wonder why their child no longer is interested in spiritual things.

Materialism is happening to youth. Not only are they being shoved into the work arena to make their "spending money," or to "buy some wheels," but also they see parents who are often more committed to providing "things" than they are to living for the Lord. Frequently the parents are recreation crazed, and allow recreational activity to keep them from worship services and periods of Bible study, or they often put optional work ahead of worship, especially if "overtime pay" is involved.

Humanism is happening to youth. Like an octopus with its many tentacles, humanism is attacking from many directions, approaching from various sources. From very tender years,

humanism's eroding influences bombard our young people incessantly; and often parents are unaware of it, and in many instances cannot be aroused to a sense of concern when told of those influences. Evolution is only one of humanism's tentacles, but it is a powerful one. How can one who is constantly told that he is but the higher form of a lower life, fail to ultimately act the part? It is bound to dilute or erode away spiritual influences unless strong teaching is given to the contrary. "Value clarification" advocates teach youth that there are no absolutes, no real definitive standard of right or wrong. This being true, what is to be expected, but that he should eventually cast aside the "old fogey" ideas of parents, preachers, Bible class teachers, and elders?

Hypocrisy is happening to youth. Children are very incisive, easily able to discern a sham. When they repeatedly see hypocritical behavior on the part of adults who are in some authority over them, it has its effect. Elders, preachers, parents, policemen, governmental officials advocating one thing while practicing another send forth uncertain sounds to youth. Especially in spiritual matters, if they see no real devotion, no depth of spiritual life, it affects them.

- by Norman E. Fultz

We NEED Doctrinal Teaching

It has been reported that American students are not doing well in important Math and Science studies. In fact, they rank 35th in the world on achievement tests in Math, and 27th in Science¹. However, it is also reported that the very same American students rank among the highest in the world regarding how they feel about their Math and Science abilities. This is direct evidence of the over-emphasis that has been given in recent years to the subjective matters of self-worth and self-esteem. Our educators have obviously worried too much about "feelings," and not enough about real learning.

We may be following the same mistaken agenda in our spiritual teaching. It seems that we have lost a sense of balance in our preaching and in our Bible class studies. We may be stressing certain "feel good" themes too much, while neglecting important instruction in matters of doctrine. The results tend to indicate this. We have a generation of Christians that don't know and can't explain simple doctrinal truths. Many would be hard pressed to explain what's wrong with instrumental music in worship, why we oppose church sponsored recreational and social activities, or what the Bible teaches about institutionalism and unscriptural church cooperative enterprises. Some could not even describe the simple New Testament plan of salvation, or prove that baptism is essential for the remission of sins.

Members of the Lord's church once had the reputation as "people of the Book." We knew and could defend the truth on a wide variety of Bible subjects. Members of various denominations dreaded, and even avoided, discussions with us because they knew that we knew the Bible and could answer their faulty arguments. Sadly, we've lost much of that reputation. Let's get back to teaching and emphasizing "all the counsel of God," while "keeping back nothing that is profitable" (Acts 20:20,27).

¹ Pew Research Center, 2/2/15

- by Greg Gwin