



Challenging your thinking!

Addressing Ideas that Influence Revival

Mistaking Disintegration for Progress

By Dr. Rick Flanders

“**A**nd he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” (Luke 16:15) Never before in the history of the United States has the state of the churches been as deplorable as it is now! The foundations are crumbling and the framework is weakening, yet their leaders are unaware that anything is wrong! Pastors think everything is going very well. Attendance and income are way up in some churches, and the largest congregations ever built in American history have grown up in the past twenty years. But the essentials of Christianity and Christian churches are fading everywhere, and the future looks bleak to discerning eyes.

The essentials of Christianity and Christian churches are fading everywhere, and the future looks bleak to discerning eyes.

Not long ago, a well-respected elder-statesman among evangelicals asked for a meeting with pastors of several large churches. At that meeting, he urged them to get together regularly to pray for revival. The disappointing response he received was that they saw no need to pray for revival. Their congregations were growing, their buildings were being expanded, and their offerings were at record levels. Why should they pray for revival when everything was going so well? Their problem (and

the problem of evangelicalism in general) is that they are mistaking disintegration for progress! In many ways, developments which are seen as healthy and positive are actually destructive and deadly! May the Spirit of God help His people see the peril in this delusion!

Mistaking Death for Life

Years ago the complaint was that the services of the churches were often “dead.” With the exception of the Pentecostal denominations, many seemed to offer Sunday programs and sermons that were irrelevant and boring. Something was needed, it was felt, to “liven” the services of most evangelical churches. To meet this perceived need,

rock music was introduced to church platforms and pulpits where it had never been allowed before. Using the euphemism, “Contemporary Christian Music,” the beat and sensuality of rock ‘n’ roll became the vehicle of communicating Christian words, and gradually the new sound spread from youth gatherings to “seeker services,” and finally to Sunday morning church!

At first, there were many protests. The “rock” style had always been associated in the entertainment world with rebellion against standards, illicit sex, and wholesale sensuality. The message of the music itself was anti-traditional and anti-biblical, according to both its creators and its critics. To use such music in the churches seemed very inappropriate to many. But eventually the effectiveness of C.C.M. in drawing crowds overcame the initial reluctance of churches to use it, and now you hear it everywhere! Church services certainly aren’t boring any more. They are “lively,” but are they alive?

Life and death are important issues in the Bible. Revelation 3 speaks to the church at Sardis, and makes this charge: “. . . Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead” (verse 1). Christians can mistake death for life. In the New Testament, death is associated with the flesh and sinful human nature. Remember what Romans 8:6 says about the fleshly (carnal) mind: “. . . To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”

Although a service dominated by rock-style “contemporary” music may be exciting, according to the Bible it is essentially dead!

Rock music is a product of the carnal mind. Nobody in the “music world” denies its sensuality and sexuality except the Christian performers who like it and want to use it. Although a service dominated by rock-style “contemporary” music may be exciting, according to the Bible it is essentially dead! It’s not boring (usually) but it is rife with the smell and feel of death.

continued next page

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Life! Look again at Romans 8. "For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot

Until the churches are purified in both their conduct and their faith, the Spirit of life will not dominate their gatherings.

please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (verses 5-13). In verse 2, the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." Until the churches are purified in both their conduct and their faith, the Spirit of life will not dominate their gatherings. Only when He does are the services full of life. The excitement in many churches today is the excitement of death, and is producing deadly results in people's lives!

Mistaking Marketing for Evangelism

Fifty or sixty years ago, evangelicals began noticing out loud that their evangelistic efforts were violating basic marketing principles. The world will not be won to Christ, it was said, until we give the world what it wants. We must stop offending them, and start appealing to them in terms they understand and appreciate. The attraction of effective marketing techniques to church leaders has grown to prominence and to dominance since they were first seriously considered.

Without dispute, smart marketing has "worked" for the mega-churches and for many evangelistic enterprises. It is the reason behind most of the success churches have experienced in numerical growth. However, it is evident that nearly all church-marketing today is based on giving people "what they want." Instead of conforming people to Christ, churches conform their ways to the world: the world's interests, the world's issues, the world's values, the world's entertainment, the world's way of living, and the world's standards.

Certainly changing the church from an organization that calls for a high degree of commitment to a service agency that demands almost no sacrifice or commitment has made the church more appealing, but it has also extracted from it the very things that make it Christ's church! Are the masses that now enter the huge religious gathering-places of our day really disciples of Jesus Christ? Remember that He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). "If the world hate you, ye know that

it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also" (John 15:18-20).

Good marketing may gather a crowd, but if it undermines the message of Christ, it will not produce converts or make disciples. We must remember (it shouldn't be hard) that church is not really about entertainment, psychology, or pop culture. People can get plenty of these things at places other than church. Church is about Jesus, the Bible, praying, salvation, and loving the Lord. Those who never get a taste for these things will not last long in church. True evangelism involves turning people from sin to God. Without this, a church is an empty shell (although it may be full), drawing people the same way that rock concerts, malls, and sports events draw them, but giving them no reason to stay. When a church gives up its essential elements to attract people, it is disintegrating, no matter how big it is.

Mistaking Recruitment for Revival

The Book of Acts in the Bible records how the first Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit and reached their world in His power with the Gospel of Christ. When the churches have followed the pattern in Acts and known the blessing of the Spirit's power, history has called such times seasons of "revival." Unfortunately, when believers are unwilling to pay the price for revival, but have wanted the blessings it brings, they have frequently faked it.

Good marketing may gather a crowd, but if it undermines the message of Christ, it will not produce converts or make disciples.

True revival comes as Christians repent of their sins, their carnality, and their worldliness, and seek the Lord for His control of their lives. However, the "look" of revival can be created on much easier terms. You don't need prayer meetings to get church members if you recruit them on their terms. When churches drop their standards to the level of accepted community morals, they are not winning the world; the world is winning them. When evangelicals water down their appeals so that sinners can take them any way they chose, no one is winning anybody!

There is no substitute for the ministry of God's Spirit in the lives of His people, but many churches have found what they think are substitutes. When they do, what's happening is not revival. Paul, in Galatians 1:10, asked, "Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Revival comes by pleasing God, not by pleasing men. The churches ought to give up the carnal and worldly methods they have been using for church growth, and go back to calling on the Lord for revival.

continued next page

Mistaking Retreat for Advance

Is it not time for us to examine and evaluate what is really happening in the churches? The numbers are up, but commitment is way down. The sermons are enjoyable, but they are seldom doctrinal. The services are exciting, but the excitement is carnal and not spiritual. The seekers crowding into the churches are not being exposed to undiluted Christianity. The churches look to Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and Las Vegas for guidance instead of the Bible. The impact of the churches on society's morals is minimal. The understanding of church-goers concerning the issues of personal salvation has diminished.

The standards of holy living have been lowered by nearly all churches. The crass pragmatism and hypocrisy of evangelicals have brought them into widespread disrepute. The churches continue to fail at experiencing revival as in years gone by. Recently, on a special report about what religions teach about Heaven, a famous interviewer had no trouble

How can the weakened health of the churches be called strength and vigor? Let's look at things the way God does, and then seek His face for the deliverance we need.

persuading an incarcerated Islamic terrorist to claim on television that his faith is the only way to be saved from Hell. On the same program however she could not get the president of the National Association of Evangelicals to say the same thing about Jesus. How can the weakened health of the churches be called strength and vigor? Christians are deceiving themselves. Should we not be reminded of what the Lord said to the Pharisees? "... That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." (Luke 16:15) Let's look at things the way God does, and then seek His face for the deliverance we need.



Dr. Rick Flanders pastored the Juniata Baptist Church in Vassar, Michigan for 34 years. In recent times God has led Dr. Flanders into frequent conference work focused on revival truth. God has blessed with touches of real revival in many hearts and many gatherings. As



of September, 2007, Dr. Flanders is now in full time itinerant ministry as the Lord has burdened him and gifted him to preach on and for revival. He may be contacted at 989-863-0784.



**Preach
the Word**
ministries

ptwm.org

About PTW | Evangelists | E-zines | Catalogs | Conferences | Revival Magazine | Sermons Online | Links | Contact Us

Visit our
Website

At www.ptwm.org you will find . . .

- ◆ Resources for revival and evangelism
 - Tracts with a clear gospel presentation
 - Books on revival, prayer, and the Spirit-filled life
 - Conference materials and music recordings
 - Sermons on cassette
- ◆ REVIVAL magazine articles for viewing online or download
- ◆ E-zine articles dealing with issues in fundamentalism
- ◆ Upcoming NETSeminar information and registration
- ◆ Itineraries of John Van Gelderen and other evangelists

The Netcasters Viewbook

Presenting the Gospel in a flip chart format



Complete Gospel Presentation in full color, beautifully designed and illustrated with multiple Scripture passages, laminated with a durable binding.

Cost: \$12.00 per Viewbook

To order call: 1-800-656-7896(PTWM)
Email: info@ptwm.org

For those who want to present the gospel clearly and effectively.



For those with a heart for soulwinning, but who are unsure of what to say.