

responding to any number of other comforting pleasures. They will however never come to the knowledge of their need for salvation if they rely on “feeling” satisfied by regularly engaging in stimulating events and practices that are nothing more than pleasing to the senses? The need for a Savior and the need to feel comforted are not the same thing. One is “feelings” and the other is “submission to God.”

Those who earnestly seek to resolve the broken relationship caused by their sins must understand and accept that —

- *God wills that they should be saved.*
- *God sent His only Son to be a sacrifice for their sins.*
- *God’s Son lived on the earth as man but without sinning as man does.*
- *Christ was the perfect Lamb of God that was sacrificed and died on the cross as foretold and promised by God.*
- *Christ was raised from the dead on the third day — death had no power over Him.*
- *God has revealed a way for the shed blood of Christ to redeem those who are lost.*

These facts are nothing more than just good information unless they result in a desire to be reunited with God by learning what God expects in order to be saved. “Feeling” great after a mega church “worship” serves no purpose unless lost souls are convicted of their sins and motivated to believe, accept, repent, and be baptized into Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. It is only through these actions that God can add them to His church. *That* church is the true mega church. It has no walls and is world wide in it’s membership.

NO amount of hype or excitement can surpass the rejoicing that happens both in heaven and on earth when someone accepts God’s terms of salvation and is reunited with Him. Those who accepted Christ as their Savior in the second century had no concerts, no big screens, no powerful bass line pumping them to a high pitched fever. They had the power of the Gospel, convicting them of the guilt of their sins, and the recognition that there was a Savior, who was Christ the Lord.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18 KJV)

No advertising, no promotional ploy, no concert, no book tour or any other “outreach” mechanism can ever be as powerful as the Gospel. Let’s be sure that the “converted” are converted to Christ — not to the beat, the hype, the positive feelings, the gym, the in-house Starbucks, the fellowship, or the author. We have *one* book that contains the very Words of God Himself. Now that’s *REALLY BIG!*

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Evangelism Then and Now

Numerous religious publications as well as the secular media, newspapers and magazines are filled with success stories concerning current examples of “mega churches.” Many of these mega churches have stages, lighting and sound systems that put the equipment of many coliseums to shame. They have energetic rock bands that pump out a bass line that literally jars the teeth of those in attendance. The audience (i.e. worshippers???) clap to the beat and sing along with the performers on the stage. ABC News reported (3-27-05) that “these mega-churches are places where members can not only pray, but work out in a gym, eat at a food court or browse in a bookstore...The Prestonwood Worship Center in Texas has 24,000 members and a 14-acre campus, complete with a cafeteria, school, bookstore and gym.” The children of one family at Prestonwood stated: “Church is actually fun. It’s not like, ‘Oh, gosh, I have to go to church and be bored and have them spit scripture in my face.’”

The Scriptures tell us that the *Lord* (not us) adds to His church (Acts 2:47), so it’s impossible to know with certainty whether or not any of those in attendance at these mega churches are a part of the church described in Acts. Exactly *who* the Lord adds to His church is not our call but we *can* read the Word and determine what God requires of those whom He will add to His church. We can read the Word and determine whether or not a worship assembly is being conducted in a manner that is in accordance with what God has revealed it should be. We can read the Word and know what the mission of the church is. But as we just read above, since no one at *these* churches is going to “spit scripture” in anyone’s face, how then would these “worshippers” ever *know* just who the Lord will add to His church — or how a worship assembly should be conducted — or what the mission of the church actually is. Far too often today, God’s authority in these matters — revealed in His Word — is not nearly as important as taking whatever steps are necessary to build a mega church.

Yes indeed, religion has become big business today — *very* big business. More specifically — *Christianity* has become big business. In an effort to not be left behind in this world of big business religion, the mega churches have impetuously jumped into the world of providing just about anything and everything that an individual could ever have need of — not the least of which is entertainment.

One of the biggest and most profitable fields in the business of religion today is *continued on page 2*

what is referred to by the recording industry as “Christian Music.” Christian music is available in everything from hard rock to a cappella and it too has evolved into not much more than just big business. It is certainly undeniable that the lyrics of the so called Christian genre recordings are *far favorable* to many of those in other music genres available today. For that alone, we should be grateful. Many young people are at least listening to lyrics that are several steps above the sex and violence that permeates so many other genres of that media.

In this age of iPods and MP3 players, the desire to be constantly entertained has moved to the forefront for many of today’s youth. Mega churches make every effort to capitalize on this phenomena and book concert after concert by big name “Christian” stars in an attempt to bring young people into their assembly. In many cases, it works. The youth perceive that such a church is open minded, hip and progressive. They enjoy the music and are drawn to the exciting concert atmosphere. Every opportunity is used during the well attended concert to promote the local congregation and all of it’s amenities (gym, foodcourt, in-house Starbucks, etc.). Those in attendance are promised the same exciting atmosphere on a weekly basis if they will just “return the following Sunday.” Many of them do return at the next appointed time to hear the “house band” perform. They get what was promised — hype, music, excitement, theater type seating — cup holders and all! They’re hooked. They can now enjoy high powered entertainment while salving their conscience by being told that it is also worship to God. No longer does worship have to include “scripture spitting.” It’s fun and entertaining! Being entertained and worshiping God are now meshed together under one heading and it’s called “progressive outreach” by those who organize it. Exactly where does the Gospel fit into this scenario? Is it Christ and His sacrifice on the cross that they are being drawn to?

Still another one of the biggest and most profitable fields in religion today is the writing and publication of books with Christian themes. It seems that *everyone* who is anyone has a book they are pushing and many of the best sellers are specifically directed at the “christian consumer.” Unfortunately however, not all that is *called* “Christian” is Christian — not in the literary field, the music industry or the mega church scene. Christ quickly becomes secondary to the entertainment factor, the positive thinking factor, the self-motivation factor, the human potential development factor, etc. Christ and His brutal death on the cross is overshadowed by the joy, hype, thrill and big business of being entertained.

The point we want to make here is that we have more, more and still more “things” that are becoming part of what churches are using to motivate their own members and to attempt to attract others to Christ. But is it Christ that they are attracted to, or is it the exciting experience of the moment? We can’t know conclusively the answer to that question, but it’s an important question — an important question that *must* be asked. Did Christ suffer and die on the cross so that our worship of Him can be an entertaining and self gratifying experience?

The use of more and more extravagant presentations in the secular world is increasing at lightning speed. Mega churches (and many not so mega) are jumping on that same bandwagon in an effort to attract more people to their assemblies. Big screens, musical productions, well choreographed speeches, drama productions and magnificent presentations are more and more frequently being used to “reach the lost.”

We have no intention of countering any of those efforts by saying they will not bring people in, because it’s obvious that good marketing, sensory stimulating presentations and high powered concerts *will* attract the masses. That’s not in question. What is in question is whether or not these kinds of big business extravaganzas are being meshed into something called religion when in fact, it is entertainment. They *must* be treated as separate elements with entirely different purposes and an entirely different focus. The focus of *worship* is God. The focus of *entertainment* is on those doing the entertaining and the gratification of those in attendance. It seems that those who flock to such extravaganzas for the purpose of worshiping God would find it quite difficult if not impossible to focus on God rather than on self gratification induced by the entertainment in front of them.

As a society we have become accustomed to being entertained and seeking more and more ways to satisfy our appetite for stimulating our senses with pleasant, positive thoughts and feelings. An intense desire to spread the Gospel in a society driven by its desire to be entertained has naturally lead to the place where many churches find themselves today. Are the senses and emotions that are being touched by the current methods being used today to reach out to the lost the same senses and emotions that were touched in those who heard the Gospel in the second century? Do those who attend such extravaganzas respond to the Gospel with the same humility and repentance as did the early Christians?

There are a few fundamental truths that will motivate the lost to search the Scriptures and learn the way to God. Recognition of these truths is the *only* motivation that can lead to salvation. Motivation from any other line of reasoning can not be God driven. This isn’t a checklist, or a to do list but rather a list of Biblical truths that will motivate lost souls to respond to the Gospel. Lost souls who are sincerely seeking salvation *must* recognize that —

- *God IS*
- *God’s Word is Truth*
- *Eternity exists in Heaven or Hell*
- *All people have sinned*
- *Sin separates us from God and from eternity with Him*

Lost souls who respond without recognizing these truths are merely responding to some other form of comfort provided by an emotion of the moment. They’re not seeking after salvation. They might be responding to the enjoyment and the comfort of associating with nice, friendly people on a regular basis. They might be seeking the enjoyment that comes from being entertained or they may be