

# *Frankly Speaking. . .*

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## **THESE CHANGING TIMES**

The one thing that is sure beside death and taxes is change. As long as this world stands, there will be change. Some call it “progress,” while others call it various other things.

There is no question that the churches of today, the ones we attend and give our money to support, are not like the churches of the first century. They have not been for a long time. We read of the primitive churches in our New Testaments; where are they today?

Some of us still preach that gospel that was preached back when churches were persuading people to read the Bijble, repent and obey it. However, almost 2000 years since the church was established, it becomes more difficult as time passes.

After over 65 years of preaching I think I have some idea of what has brought about these changes. The primary thing is that people in places of power have wanted to satisfy the masses.

We have ignored the admonition of scripture in Exodus 23:2:

*“Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to turn aside after a multitude to wrest justice.”*

Of course it is from the Old Testament but the principle is the same in any age.

## **WHERE HAS THE CHURCH CHANGED?**

Where shall I begin? Many things have happened over these two thousand years that have contributed to the changes.

I am old enough/young enough, to remember the time when the church was emphasizing the “great commission.” There was little thought of anything else. Yes, I know our classes weren’t much. Many of us learned what Bible we knew from “card class.” The preachers preached the great commission, members thought it was their duty to teach others the “truth,” and take care of those of our number who were “less fortunate.” Back then many of us were among the “less fortunate,” but so was most everyone else so we didn’t think anything of it. We certainly didn’t think the church was supposed to “help us out” so we, as most others, made do with what we had.

## **THE EMPHASIS CHANGED.**

Then the emphasis changed on what we were about. We began thinking we should do something about our classes. At first we would use denominational material and try to sort out the error and some brethren in the publishing business recognized there was money to be made in this area and we started publishing our own.

Some brethren started setting up events to teach our people how we should have “graded material” written especially for certain age groups. At first there was emphasis on teaching the truth but as time passed, the emphasis changed to getting the right “age appropriate” material and less on the truth. Academic skills began to push “thus said the Lord” toward the background.

Later on we started including other things, our young people needed a young man to see after them. When that began, I wanted to shout, **“Where are the parents?”** I don’t know what happened to parents, who had always seen after their kids? Maybe they were convinced that the “progressives” were right? Perhaps they abdicated their responsibility and just didn’t want to be bothered? So we started hiring what we called “Youth Ministers” or “Youth Directors.” Now no one has ever explained to me just what these young men were doing. So the upshot of it was we left it up to them. So, sprinkling a little

Bible and a lot of “fun” they entertained the kids and kept them out from underfoot of the parents. In all the years we have done this, we haven’t decreased the percentage of the loss of our young to the church one single bit.

Think about it! Have these Youth Ministers really instilled more spirituality in our children? If so, then why are we still losing so many of our children to the world?

## **THE EMPHASIS IN OUR PREACHING CHANGED**

There was a time when we believed:

“I charge *thee* in the sight of God, and of Christ Jesus, who shall judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:1-4 ASV).

You understand, do you not, that when we were “campaigning” for souls by knocking on doors and conducting gospel meetings people were being baptized? Our churches were growing. You know, don’t you, when the gospel was boldly preached, and the differences between the church and denominations were explicitly pronounced, the church was growing?

Members of the church complained about the plainness of our preaching. They wanted the message “toned down” so people would not get their feelings hurt by things negative. It reminds me of what they said to Isaiah, long ago. “**Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits**” (Isa. 30:10).

Preachers, fearful of losing their livelihood, complied. In some cases they became “feel good” preachers, making people feel good about their lives. Elders who wanted the church to be “successful” began measuring “success” in a different way. People who lived in sin felt

more comfortable because they were not being criticized when they attended one of our services. Preachers were complimented on their ability to “speak smooth things,” so no one would be convicted (Isa. 30:10).

## **EMPHASIS CHANGED FROM SPIRITUAL TO SOCIAL.**

It was no longer acceptable to emphasize Bible preaching and the saving of souls. We sold ourselves a bill of goods, telling ourselves we could “catch more flies with honey than vinegar.” Someone failed to tell us that we were not in the “fly business,” that it was our business to take the gospel to sinners so they would repent.

Churches began dividing the congregation into groups, and the purpose of those groups was to “have fellowship, get closer to each other.” In order to do that they had to “eat together and have social events.” Read the bulletins of churches today and count the social and recreational announcements. Then count the announcements of soul-winning events. Any change in emphasis? Then someone realized we did not have the facilities to satisfy our newly found goals. We must remedy that. So we began planning and building “multi-purpose” buildings, sometimes attached to our worship and class facilities, but at other times separate buildings.

It would be a shame for these buildings to sit idle so much so we converted them into athletic buildings to host basketball games and other such social activities. In some instances churches spent upwards of \$500,000.00 to “service the community,” and the community they were serving was themselves.

## **THE RESULT.**

Today we have churches with nice, commodious buildings, located in the good part of town, a graded Bible School program, with a respectable Sunday morning attendance, and more money than we ever thought the church would have.

We hire preachers that are “educated,” that is, they have college degrees, some churches would consider no less, regardless of their track record in soul-saving. If he can speak well, dot all his “i’s”,

make sure to cross his “t’s”, meets people well and satisfies the masses, he fits the bill.

We speak “smooth things,” to our people to keep them contented, we solicit their help and money to do our promotions, we placate them, and we blend into the communities where we should be trying to save their souls.

Our emphasis is on the here and now, being respectable and being accepted in any and all situations. Even though we have insisted on “qualified” pulpit men, we listen little to their mediocrity. As long as we attend the services it is acceptable, regardless of how we live our lives in some instances.

We have downgraded our belief in “thus sayeth the Lord,” to a mental assent of what is going on. We don’t make objections because we would be “rocking the boat.” The discussions we have, when we have discussions, are on the peripheral edges because we don’t want to get into the “meat” of things.

We won’t solve all the problems here. I have written and spoken of this for a long time and have wondered if anyone was listening. I have not been alone. We still have preachers who believe the Bible and preach it completely. The one problem I see is that there are not many that listen.

God help us to follow His word in all things.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Amuthson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

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