

www.oldpathspulpit.org

PRESENTS

Frankly Speaking . . .

Published as time and opportunity permit, usually a few times a week.

3218 Timberland Trail, Euless Texas 76040-7727 – 817.247.6630

Ed Smithson, Editor

SOULS OR CHURCHES

Several years ago, about 30 now, some of my brethren had been reading and listening to those big denominational preachers about how they built their big churches. Then they started thinking they could use the same methods the big churches used to “build” our own churches. Suddenly there appeared “specialists” or “experts” on “church growth.” Some brethren who desired to have large groups or churches or who were losing people, decided to buy into these schemes, and that is what they were, “schemes.”

Now more than 30 years, after following the dictates of “church growth specialists” churches are still losing membership and those “infallible” dictates of the “experts” have largely fallen by the wayside. One reason for this, in my judgment, is that they got into procedures that were not conducive for the Lord’s church. Consequently, for the most part they failed to accomplish the desired result.

I believe in the church. I believe that Jesus authorized one church (Matthew 16:18) and that the church he authorized was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ in Acts 2. I believe that the Lord adds to the church those who are saved. (Acts 2:47) I believe therefore that the church is made up of the saved and Christ is the Savior of the body. (Ephesians 5:23)

I remember something the late great football coach Vince Lombardi said to his team after a disappointing loss. “Men,” he said, “we are going back to basics.” He held up a football in his hand, “THIS IS A FOOTBALL.”

So if we are going to talk about the church, we have to talk about the saved. The church is not made up of neighbors and friends and people who just happen to like people in the church. The church is made up of souls that are saved because they have believed in Christ and his mission on earth, **“to seek and saved that which was lost.”** (Luke 19:10) So people are not “attracted” to the church by slick newspaper and television ads, but people who have seen themselves in sin and in need of a Savior.

You want the church to grow? Most of us do I think. But some understand that the church is grown, not by things that come out of the minds of men, but by things that come from the pages of God’s Word.

In my judgment in the last several years we have concentrated entirely too much on how we can get a larger number of people into our buildings. When the fact is that the building has absolutely nothing to do with salvation. Fifty years ago the church started thinking about “upgrades,” that is upgrading our buildings to attract more people that likes better facilities. Consequently there are buildings all over our country that is housing a small fraction of their capacity. I know of buildings that can seat as many as 500 people that only have 25 or 30 in worship each Lord’s Day.

If we want the church to grow there is only one way to do it. Give them the gospel of Christ, which is able to save their souls. (Romans 1:16) **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;”** Paul said in 1 Timothy 1:15. That completely agrees with the statement of Christ in Luke 19:10.

No one is suggesting that the church be ignored or downplayed. It is not suggested that the organization and management of the church be discounted, far from it. The church is the house in which the saved abide.

When Jesus gave the great commission he said, “go into all the world and build churches.” No, no, emphatically NO. The church has already been built. The church has already been established. What he said was, **“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel.”** (Mark 16:16) Are we missing that singular point???

So what is our responsibility? To save souls, first, last and always, to save souls. When we do this, churches will be built.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ed Smithson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent flourish at the end.

Ed Smithson

ed@oldpathspulpit.org

www.oldpathspulpit.org

January 27, 2011