

What's Your Brand?

By Steve Schmutzer

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A friend sent me a funny photo of a church sign. It read, "Whoever stole our AC units, keep one. It's hot where you are going."

I chuckled, and I hunted for more. After finding a few, I came across one that was supposed to be funny, but it made me wince. It said, "Jesus is coming. Look busy." I guess the Lord's return is a serious matter to me.

Witty signs aside, I think too many churches are promoting ridiculous schemes to fill their pews. In a 2013 NPR report, researchers found a number of congregations across America are even resorting to beer as an idea to attract new members - and some beer functions are being held *in* the churches!

I see all sorts of new marketing ideas here. "Ladies and gentlemen, today's sermon is being sponsored by Miller Lite - 'tastes great, less filling.'"

Hmm. Given the substance of many sermons these days, I guess that's rather fitting - but, I digress here.

Other churches avoid "last call," but they promote gluten-free communion wafers, drive-through prayer windows, church-sponsored MMA fights, DJ worship, and gun giveaways. We've certainly come a long way since the Reformation, haven't we?

Unfortunately, the mantra of the modern church is all-too-often "the end justifies the means." Since their end goal is to boost attendance, erratic leaps from one poorly-conceived idea to the next don't always have the right Biblical focus on changed lives.

The result is we have a disturbing trend of the public's values infecting the church rather than the pulpit's truth affecting the public. I like a beer now and then - but just as good leaders must secure their nations with strong borders, good church leaders must secure their ministry with sound choices.

So what's *your* brand? What perception do people have when they hear or think of your church?

Let me offer a simple word of counsel here for pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, trustees, and anyone else who has a role in sculpting their church's ministry within their respective communities.

Let God build your church.

He's certainly able to do that according to Acts 2:44-47. This brief account of the start of the New Testament church concludes with the line, "*And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*"

What you will read just before that is the church was behaving like a church - not like a rave, a pub, or the WWF. The new church in Acts engaged in regular and proper worship - they were in right communion with God and with each other. They conducted themselves like a community of believers instead of being like the world around them.

Their choices and conduct were governed by their faith that they most prized. They did their part to “...build up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12), and God did His part to bless their efforts.

I need to point out something rather important – and obvious – here: the early church made no effort to be attractive to the lost. I doubt that, had they had the opportunity, they would have given their church a name like Vibe Church or Solomon’s Porch to avoid being “too denominational.” The church in Acts didn’t offer yoga programs, interfaith worship, and “happy hour.”

The bigger picture in the book of Acts is all about the commitment of the early disciples to the singular truth of God’s Word, and what’s clear in reading Acts is they went all over the place boldly preaching it. They actively evangelized and confronted the scourge of sin around them with the remedy of the Gospel. New converts *then* became part of the church - and that’s how the early church grew.

The bottom line is the church in Acts preserved a proper corporate relationship with Christ, and that was expressed in how they worshipped and treated each other. As a result, God expanded their ministry.

The first condition leads to the second one. If we “abide in Him” (John 15:4) as we ought to, there *will be* fruit. That is true for churches and it’s true for individuals. It’s still the same today as it was then. If we are in a right relationship with Christ, there is fulfillment in living and productivity in ministry.

So for any church leaders that are (still) reading this - let God define your church’s vision and establish its plans (James 4:13-15). Let Him supply your needs (Philippians 4:19), direct your paths (Prov. 3:5-6), heal your divisions (1 Cor. 1:10-13), satisfy your longings (Ps. 107:9), and grow your numbers (Acts 2:47). It is nothing but vanity to build a house or toil in fruitless anxiety unless the Lord is in it fully and over it totally (Ps. 127:1-2).

Each of us are required to show up every day wherever we are supposed to be in order to do the best job we can with whatever we have. As the church belongs to God, so *everything* in life belongs to Him. All the instructions of the last paragraph apply to each one of us in our jobs, our families, our possessions, our ministries, and our hopes and dreams. For this short wisp of time that defines our earthly lives, God has given us stewardship of these things as a means for us to demonstrate our proper relationship with Him.

I’ll make this personal. God is far more concerned about my relationship with Him than my relationship with everything and everybody else. Every trial is a chance for me to demonstrate my faith (James 1:2), and every triumph is a chance for me to display the glory of God. I short-circuit these wonderful opportunities when I choose to act like the world or stoop to its standards.

It may be old-fashioned in some places to “do church the Biblical way,” but I’m pretty sure that’s still the approach that most pleases God.