

Thoughts on Christianity and the Church

June 27 2009: Church Structure and Evangelism

I am a Southern Baptist. One of the hallmarks of the Southern Baptist denomination is the emphasis on evangelism. I have been a member of a number of Southern Baptist churches, and have visited even more, and I can testify that each church will stress evangelism to a greater or lesser extent - in some, they merely talk about it; in others, they militantly engage in it - but they all affirm that it is each individual Christian's responsibility to seek the salvation of others. I would say that in the case of most Southern Baptists, this emphasis produces an honest concern that friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers, etc., have "*Fire Insurance*", that by saying the "magic prayer", the person has escaped hell and is heaven-bound. In other cases, the motive is mere duty, or obligation, and the person takes a "soul-winning course" or participates in a campaign or program to tell others. I have known a few cases where the person (usually a new believer) is so fired up about his/her new experience with God that they would like their associates to enjoy the same experience - May Their Tribe Increase. Now, from what I understand, this emphasis on evangelism is present in other evangelical denominations in a similar way, and perhaps even in some Catholic and Orthodox churches. Maybe people will tell me what their experiences have been.



And yet... from what I have seen personally, and from the deluge of books from Barna and others, this emphasis on evangelism is not producing much fruit. Even in the more militant churches, who may have a higher rate of baptisms than others, per capita, there isn't much. The "seeker sensitive" fad, which seems to be running out of steam after making an indelible mark on church "worship" services and the strategies of church starts, is clearly a reaction to this problem of ineffectiveness. Perhaps the new "emerging" or "post-modern church" movement is also a reaction (although I can testify, there are other cards in play for this movement).

Why is this? I can only speak for myself, as someone who is (by my own admission, regrettably) not evangelistic. Maybe Barna has done a proper study on this, or if not, maybe he ought to. Maybe others can send me their stories.

1. I don't have anything to share.

Yes, I am convinced that God is Real, and Jesus is God, and the Bible is True, and I have good reasons for believing these things. I am trying to live my life consistently with these beliefs (with varying degrees of success), and I suppose I have more grounds to react equably to death (even my own, when threatened by my bout with cancer) and economic disaster and even the destruction of my nation by triumphant liberals, than most people. Maybe others would desire such confidence of belief... but from the indications I pick up from my unbelieving friends and neighbors, they don't really want what I have.

Sometimes I see new believers that are fired up, and passionate about their new relationship with Jesus, as I mentioned above. I think they've got something to sell! And they do sell some of it. But usually, it doesn't last. As my old pastor says, "they got saved and then got over it." From what I tell from Scripture, the "fruit of the Holy Spirit" - love, joy, peace, etc. - should grow with spiritual maturity, not diminish, and yet from what I observe from my Christian fellows, it isn't happening. Something is wrong, and it isn't just me.

2. My church doesn't have anything to offer.

I have invited friends to "come to church" (christianese for "attend a service"), and some have come with me and have heard the gospel message - and turned away. I don't bother anymore. I am still very concerned for their future state (i.e., the "fire insurance" bit), and believe they would be happier and more fulfilled than I see them being if they would embrace the Truth and live their lives more consistently with the Truth, rather than suffer long-term grief (even in this earthly life) by living contrary to the Truth. "Reality Bites." But I have realized... if I *do* get the to "come to church", or say the "magic prayer"... then what?

Church is Evangelistic.

If the church is militantly evangelistic, like at least one I've been in, then the "soul-winning" meme is consistent and constant. At one point I realized: "If I bring my unbelieving friends in here, what are they going to hear? How we all have to be out winning souls. That's not going to impress them." It also isn't what they need, or want. Now, that was pretty extreme, but a "soul-winning" church doesn't have much to offer unbelievers other than "Fire Insurance", and it doesn't have much to offer new believers other than to be put under the obligation to win others to Christ. The churches I've known that are like this *do* see more confessions and baptisms than others - but the new believers overwhelmingly tend to *not* stick around.

Church is a Religious Club.

Maybe a church is focused on maintaining its denominational identity. I've known a few

Methodists and Presbyterians who were aware of how badly their denomination was failing to hold to the One True God as revealed through Scripture - *including their own church* - yet they stick with it because, well, they were a Methodist or a Presbyterian. A church that continues to exist because the members are more interested in remaining in their denomination despite the rampant doctrinal error has little to offer new believers but poison.

Maybe a church is focused on its physical plant, or its history. First Baptist Church of Tucson had an impressive building downtown, but the pastor and the few members when I visited were fixated on "growing" (getting more members) so they could continue to support the expensive real estate they occupied.

First Baptist Church of Tucson was founded in 1881. One Hundred and Twenty Eight years ago. This was the year of the gunfight in the OK Corral in Tombstone. It was still the Arizona Territory. It breaks my heart that they no longer exist. But a history has nothing but pride to offer new believers. I believe this is true even more for old churches in the East, like in Boston and New York and even New London, Connecticut (and I visited a few there!).

Maybe a church exists for the social contact between members. Maybe a church was a vibrant entity in the past, when it was founded, and new believers came in from the community to be part of what was happening. But now those people have grown older, and most have moved out of the community (especially true for urban churches), and they don't really have a vision for reaching the community - it's just an opportunity to visit with their old friends for an hour or two on Sunday morning. What kind of person would be interested in a church like that? Other "church people" with the same values. Not new believers.

Church is focused on Social Activism.

Maybe a church is focused on feeding the hungry (good!) or rescuing illegal immigrants dying of thirst in the desert (well, maybe good) or fighting abortion (depending on how they do it) or protesting at homosexual events with signs saying "God Hates Fags" (**not good**). Unbelievers may come into a church like that - if their personal agendas mesh - and maybe some will find Christ. However, will they grow in Christ, or will they come to confuse Christianity with the mission of the church? How long can a new believer last with that kind of misconception?

What is the bottom line?

The core values of a church affects a number of aspects of its effectiveness in bringing souls into the Kingdom:

- **The attractiveness of the church community to unbelievers.** If the focus is something other than Christ, then it isn't Christ they are offering to unbelievers. Even if techniques such as an evangelism strategy, or "seeker sensitive" sermons or upbeat music during a church event, or other "bridge events" like revival

services or block parties or "Superbowl Sundays" are used to try to draw people in, it amounts to "Bait and Switch" if it is *fire insurance* or an agenda or anything other than a growing relationship with Jesus.

- **The ability to retain new believers, and incorporate them into the Body.** If the only way they can fit in is to adopt the (non-Christ-centered) core values of the group, some might, but most won't. Possibly in a large church, this pressure to conform will be ameliorated by the opportunity to "get lost in the crowd" or fall in with a subgroup that splits from the "party line", but these options don't contribute to spiritual growth, either.
- **Producing mature believers with the winsome characteristics and confidence to engage and influence unbelievers in turn.** It's pretty hard to make disciples (let alone converts) if a church isn't capable of making disciples. If it happens at all, it happens by God's provision, perhaps contrary to the values of the church.

So what is the answer?

The church must understand "Discipleship", and have a strategy for incorporating new believers into the Body.

Now, "discipleship" doesn't mean "Bible Study", although that's part of it, but rather a whole-life connection with Jesus that shows up in attitudes (*joy, peace, love*), personal worship and devotion habits, moral purity, and relations to other people (friendship, sympathy, service, sacrifice).

I'm reading through I Corinthians right now, and Paul's teachings on charismata gifts like speaking in tongues, which he says "are a sign to unbelievers." Laying aside the controversial topic of "tongues", a church filled with members that demonstrate the living reality of the Spirit and a sincere love for one another - this would be a church worth inviting your friends to! I believe they would see something they wanted. I'll bet they would see it in you, too!

An interesting point to note: Such a church will likely be evangelistic as well. What value is a discipleship strategy if nobody ever goes through it?

May 24 2009: God's Will

You may have noticed that it has been more than a month of gap in the posts here, and even on the main page. It's hard to write (or code) when you're bummed or depressed.

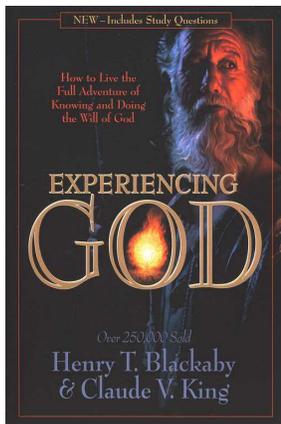
Jeremiah McDuffie, our associate pastor / church planter, has announced that "God is leading" him to leave Tucson and return to Georgia to go to school.

In a way, this is no surprise. With the demise of Element, Jeremiah had faded into the supporting role of arranging the music on Sunday mornings, and alternating preaching

sermons with Travis. Even the few attempts he made at innovation (such as representing Central at the Susan G. Komen "Race for the Cure" fundraising/running event) got no attention (or even negative attention... from me). I think everyone was waiting for the announcement.

And I really shouldn't be surprised that the announcement took the form of "God is leading me." That's the way pastors do things, I guess. This may have been the case with a man who declared to our previous church that "God was leading" him to be the youth pastor, and six months after being installed in that role, "God was leading" him to be the pastor of a smaller church on the southwest side. I don't think God was really leading him in contradictory directions, but I don't know if he really believed God was leading him, or if he was just saying that. The result of that experience (and others) is for me to dismiss claims by pastors that "God is leading" them.

But Jeremiah is a friend, and I have been closer to his ministry than I have to others'. When Jeremiah originally came, he told us that "God was leading" them to serve at Tucson, and I believe he really believed God was leading him. I believe He was, too. When Jeremiah went through all the steps of setting up Element, including dealing with the SBC denomination, planning the service structure, enlisting band members, even doing the Sjogren "evangelism through good deeds" strategy, I believe he really believed God was leading him. However, I was increasingly less convinced, and more inclined to think that he was following the standardized church plant script, or getting other people's ideas out of books. When Jeremiah arranged with Rincon High School to hold services there for a month at a substantial rental fee, I believe he was convinced that God was leading him to do so. In light of the results, I highly doubt that God was leading him; I think he was reading God's will into his own desires. And now, I assume he really believes God is leading him back to Georgia after only three years and not much more than failure to show for it.



All this shows is that it is possible for people (by no means limited to pastors) to claim, even with sincere belief, that they are following God's will that He has revealed to them, when in fact He has not. Now, last year, I went through the "Experiencing God" study with Jerri, Jeremiah, and Stacy. It is clear that some, like author Henry Blackaby and people in the Canadian churches he served in, really *can* get in touch with God's will and see amazing things happen. So it *IS* possible... but it is more than interpreting some pious impression you've got as God's will.

But the study is a bit inconsistent on this point. Every week, for five days, there is "homework"; a personal study. At the end of every study exercise, there are three questions: "What statement or verse was most meaningful for you?" "Write a prayer to God in response to that statement or verse." "What do you think God is telling you to do?" In essence, the exercise is encouraging you to record some impression you've had as if it were God's word to you.

Well, already, semi-consciously, I had been constructing a logical argument for myself, that if I really wanted the young people I lead to get connected with God, I needed to get connected with God myself, that I was not equipped to help them achieve something I had not achieved myself. This argument expressed itself during the study as, "God wants me to set aside the youth ministry so I can focus on Him." Perhaps I should have taken this a bit more seriously and sought God if this was really a word from Him, but I was distracted by (bummed about) other more immediate matters, so I did not.

A few weeks ago (about when the gap started), I was mad at God over something, and I told Him, "How am I supposed to do what You want when You never tell me what it is?". Boom, the idea popped into my head, "What did you do with the word to set your youth work aside?"

Wow, I thought, knocked back. Maybe that impression during the EG study *really was* God's word to me! Since then, I have been struggling with myself - or maybe with God - about whether the impression (and subsequent wake-up) was something I ought to take seriously. Part of me recognizes that, despite what the well-meaning adults at Central tell me, I really haven't seen much spiritual advancement with nearly any of these young people. What they really need is to be led by their parents, and I have failed to connect with these parents in any meaningful way. So there isn't much to be lost if I *did* drop it. It may be a precursor to something more useful God wants to do with me. It may even be a necessary step to leaving Central - and maybe the dysfunctional institutional church. But some of those kids really need some love and godly influence; they don't get much of that (or any) at home. So I'm really conflicted. I guess this is the difference between me and someone who is more inclined to accept an impression as God's word to them - I am more inclined to skepticism, and will struggle with it.

I guess I need to get some neutral, Christian counsel, perhaps from Travis or rather some other disinterested pastor. So this little chapter isn't over yet.

May 23 2009: Volunteering and "Good Deeds"

As this [World Magazine article](#) discusses, President Obama is trying to preempt churches and other charitable, faith-based organizations from doing altruistic service with his (paid, and not-yet-compulsory) AmeriCorps service program. As the theory goes, historically, churches and other such ministries provided social benefits, and the government stuck to governing, but with the rise of the New Deal and Great Society programs, government moved into the "providing benefits" arena and started "crowding out" private entities with public funding and onerous regulation.

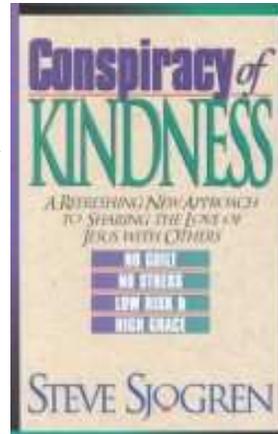


Maybe. Or maybe it doesn't matter. In the last hundred or two hundred years or so, as

major denominations embraced evolution and theological liberalism, the Christianity and *agape* faded into the bland, doctrine-free civic religion we have now (and now even *that* is fading away), but the *works* remained. Perhaps there was a time where the God-image concern for fellow humans was suppressed by human evil and selfishness, and the Christians were noteworthy for sacrificing their own interests for others, such as caring for plague victims or lepers. Maybe this is still the case for extreme examples like Mother Teresa. However, for the most part, volunteers and doers of "random acts of kindness" are just viewed as *nice people*. Or, they are viewed with suspicion: "Okay, what are you selling?"

- A year or two back, when Element was trying to get off the ground, we followed the Sjogren "evangelism through kindness" plan, like serving free coffee in front of a grocery store or the Walmart, or handing out soda or cold water in the park. Most people accepted the free gifts, but they nodded knowingly when they were given a card with the Element information. It was PR, and they understood.

In fact, we even had some conflict with this activity when the Central people were asked to help, and they asked why they were distributing "Element" info cards, and not "Central Baptist" info cards.



- Central Baptist has enlisted as "volunteers" for Duffy Elementary School, which is right near by. Most of this was providing schoolroom goods or craft supplies. A few weeks ago, a few of us (very few) helped at their "Beautify Duffy Day" work project. The following week, Duffy held a Volunteer Appreciation dinner. Several Centralites went, many Duffy parents were there, and a large contingent from the United Methodist Church was there. While the community relations officer from the school pointed out that the churches were represented, there was no special comment about it, any more than the local businesses who donated.

I haven't visited the UMC, but Travis has, and he tells me the light of Truth and the Gospel burns very dimly there, even among the all-female pastoral staff. So I may be wrong, but I will guess that those UMC volunteers were motivated more by the civic religion *nice people* principle than an explicit Christian love. But even in the back of the Central Baptist people's minds was the hope that we might impress some Duffy families to come and check us out.

- About that same time, a church down on Broadway was doing a big "do good deeds for free" push. There must have been six teams on major intersections on the East side handing out cold water to motorists. They were having a Free car-wash in their parking lot. I don't know if they were following the Sjogren plan, or if their motive was PR or altruism, but I'll bet I know how the passers-by thought about it. I know how I did.

So the upshot is, people in our increasingly secularized culture see volunteers either in a

neutral light (they are just *nice people*, or, we expect people to volunteer their time and effort) or even with suspicion or hostility (why are you doing this? It's just PR, isn't it?). So what should our reaction as Real Christians be to this climate of normalized volunteerism?

1. First, we don't stop volunteering or doing good deeds. Even if other people volunteer because their civic religion inspired conscience moves them to, or they are putting on a PR job for their cause, or even if the government is paying them (in cash or advantages), if we are to love as Christ loved us, we must serve.
2. Second, we cannot hope that people will be impressed favorably for Christianity by our volunteering. At the very least, if we are doing good works for our neighbors as part of an evangelism or "getting more church members" campaign, our motives are not Christian. People are created in God's image and are worthy of love and service as ends in themselves, and not as means to some other end like bolstered baptism numbers or membership lists.

April 18 2009: The Problem with Dads



Earlier this month, I went to a funeral of a dad whose kids would have attended at our youth group, but they didn't, because this dad didn't care about church (and not just Central, but *any* church, since they didn't go anywhere else, either). However, the pastor assured us that the dad was in heaven now, because he had prayed the "magic prayer".

So the dad was supposedly a Christian, but the dad did not guide his family in the Christian faith, and the dad was not active himself in the Christian faith. That is true of several men (middle age fathers) at Central Baptist, and it shows in their families - their children's lives, values, and behaviours. That's been true in other churches I've visited, and even of families of relatives and friends. Nor am I putting myself above all that; I'm certainly aware that I fall short in my Christian faith as a dad and a husband. I need help, too.

One of the best things a church could do is disciple fathers in their Christianity. Probably until a church does that, the families will continue to languish, and since the church is built of those families, the church will languish and drift, and young people will abandon it. Which is what we see at Central. Which is what we see in Western Christianity today.

I believe Pastor Al Addleman of [Cornerstone Bible Church](#) (which meets at the Central Place also) understands this point, and desires to have their men more active in their Christian faith. Perhaps this angle should be expected of a "Family-Integrated Church".

What to do? Well, one thing that *doesn't* work is "Men's Fellowships", where the guys

get together, have a meal, maybe watch a sports event together, possibly have the pastor deliver a "message". No expectations, no spiritual meat, just another church program. I think retreats could be good, like Father/Son campouts, but only as a part of something more purposeful and intentional. Something regular, and accountable, like a monthly small-group or class to emphasize

- Personal spiritual habits, like devotions and personal prayer, which usually is regarded as "women stuff"
- Leading his family in frequent (if not daily) "family altar" times
- Participating in church ministry projects, like work crew, or visiting in the county jail, or helping at the local rescue mission

Things like that. Probably with follow-up by the pastor or accountability partners. Certainly this strategy would be tailored or gradually "evolve" to fit the setting of the church and the personalities of the men. There would have to be some sort of expectation for participation; it can't be yet another "nice program" or opportunity provided by the church that is clearly elective. A condition for church membership? Maybe, but membership isn't such a precious thing anymore.

Still thinking on this one. Maybe there's something that can be done in the context of a youth/student ministry, but better as part of a children's ministry, so the dad's deepening commitment can have a maximal effect on his kids. However, there's no question this could work effectively if isolated to the youth/student or children's ministry, away from the master strategy of the church, as directed by the pastors or primary leaders of the church.

April 15 2009: The End of Christian America?

This is a subject that's quite in the news lately, in the wake of studies and surveys indicating that the percentage of Americans who identify as Christians has dropped significantly in the past few years. [This entry](#) on Hugh Hewitt's blog, has some good links, and specifically, [this article](#) in the Religion section of a major secular news organization treats the subject.

Interestingly, the Examiner article is mostly concerned about the loss of political influence of a retreating church. Interesting, but probably not surprising; to the extent that the Examiner, like nearly all news agencies, is dominated by a liberal or left-leaning social perspective, an Examiner religion editor would likely be focused on influences resisting the liberal political agenda.

So there are two aspects to this suggested retreat of Christianity - one, the political/cultural; the other, the spiritual implications.



Loss of Political Influence

When secular or liberal commentators note that the decrease of self-identifying Christians in our nation ought to result in a reduced influence of social conservatism, they remark this is a "good thing". In the case of the Examiner article, it is a "good thing" to return to "the separation of church and state", as if the decades since Jerry Falwell set up the Moral Majority had been a relentless march to theocracy. If Christians had really been distracted from a primary devotion to God by the culture wars, and the loss of culture warriors leads to despair and capitulation in the culture wars, and then the remaining Christians return to that primary devotion to God, then in some sense this *could* be good for Christianity in America. However, I think this is unlikely to have a large effect on politics. First, yes, I know some people (church members) who have been focused (even obsessed) on the culture wars, and some of those people, injured by the church or a pastor, or succumbing to unanswered doubts, renounced their Christian beliefs, but *they did not abandon social conservative ideas and embrace the liberal agenda!* Secondly, I know other people (often members of other churches) who claim to be Christian but already operate out of a liberal paradigm. If people like this drop a claim to a faith that they never genuinely had, it does not increase their support for the liberal causes they had already favored. So either way, people change their religious identity without changing their voting patterns.

More importantly, the hope by social liberals that resistance to their favorite policies will dissipate as Christianity does is self-destructive. The problem is, as Christians retreat, not merely non-Christians, but anti-Christians advance. It isn't Christians who want to tear down public monuments to faith and set up their own, it's atheists. It isn't Christians who want to institute propaganda in the schools and workplaces, it's militant homosexuals who want to enforce hate-speech laws and sensitivity training in companies and "tolerance" in schools. It isn't Christians who want to push the boundaries of personhood into the womb, and even outside, or to exclude the sick, the elderly, or the merely depressed, it's feminists and university professors. The net effect of the loss of a Christian basis for culture will be a loss of freedom, not only for Christians, but for everyone.

Loss of Spiritual Truth

Another problem for the secularists is, the retreat of faith leaves a vacuum that non-faith has nothing to fill. Another faith will fill that void, and from the example of England, France, the Netherlands, and even Minnesota, that faith is Islam. The examples offered in [this Powerlineblog entry](#) illustrate how the West, so adept at suppressing and belittling our historic Christian faith basis, are unable to reject the demands of muslim activists. Muslims are politically and culturally active, like the secularists accuse Christians of being, but muslims do this "because the quran says so". Probably a lot of Christians are politically active because "the Bible says so", but some more far-seeing ones have a slightly different motivation.

Acting contrary to reality is dangerous and destructive. When an individual acts contrary to reality, the result is a ruined life and a soul lost for eternity in hell. That's bad. When a society acts contrary to reality, a lot of lives are ruined. That's worse. If a Christian is politically active in order to divert his nation toward acting more consistently with reality, it is his concern for people's lives that is at work, not a desire to have things "because the Bible says so".

.....

Now, all this was focused, like the Examiner's religion editor, on political and cultural implications of the retreat of Christianity in the West. How should we Christians see this trend?

Or how should we *not* see it? First, a recent and accelerating trend of apostasy is not an indication that Christianity is not true. Truth is Truth, whether anybody believes it or not. In fact, since a Great Apostasy is prophesied for the onset of the End Times, if masses of people are renouncing their Christian faith, it is more an indication of the Truth of Christianity, and the nearness of the hour. Second, if masses of people are hanging up on Jesus, it is not a call for more evangelism. This is just more "doing what we've always done", with an additional urgency, not of saving souls from hell, but of restoring a political majority. If we are in our current situation in spite of our traditional evangelistical emphasis, then just working harder to do more of the same is not likely to change things. In fact, it might just make it worse.

Remember, these are people who once claimed to be Christians. If they have renounced their belief due to real or perceived failures of the church, then it is our broken church model which is at fault. If they have merely abandoned a faith claim that never meant much to them, then the church has failed to provide an understanding of what "being a Christian" really is, as well as a means to get there. Thus, the correct response to the situation is to examine our church structures and strategies, *and change them to be more effective*, at discipleship and how to live our Christianity together in community.

If we do this, maybe we can reclaim some of these wanderers.

.....

[This post](#) on Mark D. Roberts' site describes Mark's notice of the retreat of Christianity in America, and Skye Jethani's perspective on it. It's not necessarily bad, not something that should be bewailed, certainly nothing that should inspire despair. It's true, and God said it; He uses small, weak things for His glory, not powerful cultural institutional forces like the Western church used to be.

April 4 2009: Expectations *from* Church Members



Yep. Another funeral. Another father of young people I hang out with.

Or perhaps that's not quite right; perhaps better, "would hang out with if I could". When the kids were little, they would come to Sunday Morning activities semi-regularly. When the older ones entered Jr. High, they came a few times, and then quit entirely. After a few attempts to get those older kids involved in ministry activities, and hearing how busy they were with soccer and swimming team stuff, I quit trying, also. So I never formed any sort of relationship with them or the parents. The result of this is, I attended the funeral out of honor to the family, but I didn't really have anything to say to them. **I don't have anything to offer them.**

People hang up on church when their expectations aren't being met. What were the expectations of this family that we were failing?

- **The kids came because their mom brought them. The mom had friendship relationships with the old-time Central Baptist ladies who ran the Children's Sunday School ministry. I as the youth guy didn't form any sort of friendship with her. As the Children's ministry dwindled, and those old teacher friends withdrew to "worship" service-only attendance, there was less to hold her.**
- **Some other kids are in the youth/student group because of friendship relationships they have formed with me, and they come in spite of the non-involvement of their parents. I failed to connect with these two older kids on a personal level.**
- **Some kids in the group are there with friendships they have with other kids in the group. Some other kids I know are *not* part of the group (even though their brothers/sisters are) because they never connected with the "regulars". These older kids in this family never connected with the "regulars", either.**
- **In other youth groups, young people are attracted and retained by the program (i.e., "fun" and "entertainment"). My thing is not to entertain, or even to build a crowd. So if the mom and/or the kids were looking for flash and excitement and activity, no surprise they didn't find it at Central.**
- **Many of the adults remain part of Central because of their expectations about the "worship" service - music, quality of the preaching. Apparently, this family didn't share those expectations. In fact, the church plant, "Element", attempted to provide an alternate "worship" service (music, preaching styles) to appeal to a different crowd, but failed to meet the expectations of any other group (certainly not for lack of trying or advertising).**

So, to the extent that this family, and doubtless many others, are looking for social

connections or religious entertainment or programs to drop their kids off at, Central Baptist has failed to meet their expectations. **We don't have anything to offer them.** This isn't to say that Central has *no* opportunities for social connection or programming, but that what we *do* have doesn't appeal to much anyone else than those who are still attending.

But should a church strive to meet the expectations of members (current *and* prospective) who are looking for social connections or religious entertainment or programs of activities? Those are good things, but they can't be the central mission of a church. Jesus should be the focus of a church, and the mission should be to conform members' lives to Him. To what extent does a church abandon its primary mission and focus when it attempts to capture and retain people who don't place that much value on Jesus?

What about members (current and prospective) who are looking for a church that *is* focused on Jesus, and expect to find a community of believers who *are* striving to conform their lives to Him?

How many of our American evangelical churches **wouldn't have anything to offer them?**

The books I've been reading indicate that people are hanging up on *those* churches.