

CHURCHES, ARE YOU BRIBING THE MASSES?

Michael Pickford

"A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor; Wherever he turns, he prospers" (Proverbs 17:8).

In this proverb, Solomon isn't praising bribery, he's exposing the mindset behind it. The word "present" refers to a gift, often given to gain favor, influence, or popularity. To the one who gives it, that gift looks like a "precious stone," something powerful and effective. In his own eyes, it guarantees success. He assumes that wherever he turns, his gifts will open doors and make things happen. That is the exact attitude many churches have adopted.

Instead of trusting the power of God's word, they lean on what they believe are "precious stones" — food, games, entertainment, social activities, events, programs, prizes. They think, "If we offer enough incentives, we'll grow. If we entertain the young people, they'll come. To them, these things seem effective and prosperous. After all, they fill the building.

But Proverbs 17:8 shows us that this is a carnal confidence, not divine approval. The New Testament teaches that the Gospel, not gifts, is what saves and draws. Paul wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation"* (Romans 1:16). If the Gospel is the power that converts, then the Gospel is what must be used to reach people. You convert people to what you convert them with. If you fill the building with material "gifts," take away the gifts and see how many remain. If you hotdog them in, another church will hamburger them out. Nah, drop the bribes. Stick to the Bible.

The church of Thessalonica was praised for sounding forth the word (gospel), not winning the recent softball tournament, or serving the best fried chicken in town (1st Thessalonians 1:8).

God's design for the work of the church is seen in the types of leaders He set in the church. *"He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers"* (Ephesians 4:11). Notice what's missing from that list: entertainers, chefs, event planners, activity directors, etc. And their purpose is not to feed, amuse, or entertain the congregation. It's to build Christians up in knowledge and truth so they will not be *"tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine"* (Ephesians 4:12-14). That's real prosperity (John 6:27).

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GOD IS NOT A RAPIST

Bryan Matthew Dockens

The rapist thinks that he loves the woman he intends to violate. Such was the case with Amnon's obsession for his half-sister Tamar (2nd Samuel 13:1). As did Amnon, the rapist schemes to have his way with the object of his desire (2-10). The rapist ignores the pleas of his victim to be left alone (12-14). Finally, the rapist subdues his subject and forces himself on her (14).

God is not a rapist. Contrary to the Calvinistic doctrine of "Irresistible Grace", His love and salvation may be accepted or rejected by each soul, according to that one's choice.

God is not a rapist. Like any true lover, He wants His affection reciprocated. *"We love Him because He first loved us"* (1st John 4:19).

God is not a rapist. His love is offered, not coerced. *"Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"* (Revelation 22:17).

God is not a rapist. He heeds those who refuse Him. Jesus went to Nazareth to preach, but His neighbors *"were offended at Him"* (Mark 6:3), thus limiting His effectiveness (5), and causing Him to depart (6).

In fact, *"many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, 'Do you also want to go away?'"* (John 6:67-68). Consistently, the Lord affords people freedom to accept Him or reject Him. Never does He force Himself on a soul.

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The church doesn't need to bribe the masses. It needs to teach the truth. Young people especially are not looking for games; they're looking for spiritual guidance, clear explanations of difficult passages, answers to their Bible questions. They are intelligent people who want meaningful Bible answers and guidance. Offering them entertainment instead of Scripture doesn't build their faith, it insults their intelligence.

Churches, stop relying on "precious stones." Draw people with Bible teaching (cf. John 6:26-27, 44-45). Build them with the word of God. That's how God wants the church to grow.

"WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?"

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER"

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belén, New Mexico

Seekers Welcome.
Members Expected.

"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN ANY TRESPASS... RESTORE SUCH A ONE"

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN"

PROVERBS 25:11

"You will achieve much more by
being consistently reliable than
by being occasionally
extraordinary."

– Sahil Bloom

GIVE ME THE BIBLE

KDNF 840AM

Sunday @ 9:00 a.m.

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

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FOREKNOWLEDGE

Bryan Matthew Dockens

The programmer who knows ahead of time what his robots will do may impress by his programming skills, but not by his foreknowledge. The coach who knows ahead of time the plays his team will use on the field may impress by his coaching skills, but not by his foreknowledge. The director who knows ahead of time what lines his actors will speak may impress by his directing skills, but not by his foreknowledge.

If the foreknowledge of God exists only because He makes His creatures behave in certain ways, then only His brute force can really impress, not His foreknowledge. Yet, that is how He is portrayed in Calvinistic theology: the God who knows all merely because He preordained it.

However, the God who permits His creatures free will, allowing them to make their own decisions, and still knows ahead of time what those choices will be is marvelous, indeed!

God, who created time and put man in it (Genesis 1:14), exists outside of time (2nd Peter 3:8), being eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27). Therefore, He is fully able to observe *"the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done"* (Isaiah 46:10). The Almighty's foreknowledge extends from His divine quality of eternality, not heavy-handed preordination.

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