

# **The Old Hickory**

## **Bulletin**

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## **The "Market Driven" Approach and Cultural Influence**

by Gary Kerr

Many preachers are discouraged. We live in an age of thirty-second sound bites and thirty minute TV programs. Modern advertising techniques have glamorized everything from drinking beer to mopping floors to cleaning toilets. How does this contribute to the discouragement of preachers? Simply stated, modern culture has put pressure on preachers to become super salesmen, and to market both themselves and the local church in a way that will appeal to the modern mind.

This cultural pressure is apparent in two ways. First, preachers receive criticism about preaching too long. The brethren say, "Make us feel good... and do it in thirty minutes!" Second, preachers are pressured to make the local church appealing to the masses. Thus, we cannot condemn sin because that might offend people and drive them away. We cannot practice New Testament discipline, because that would make us appear unkind and unloving in the eyes of the community. We cannot preach topical lessons on doctrinal subjects because we do not want to appear legalistic in our approach. Brethren in many places have fallen in with the times. They demand that we "market" the church so that we can appeal to today's mind and "win more souls to Christ." In dealing with these problems, I will refer to a book entitled **Ashamed of the Gospel** by John E. MacArthur, Jr. I recommend this book with some hesitation, because MacArthur is a Calvinist, and there is some Calvinism in the book. However, he is dealing with the same things that local churches of Christ are confronting. What is happening among our brethren is neither new nor unique with us.

The book deals with what MacArthur calls the "market approach to Christianity." This is the idea that a local church must organize, work and worship in such a way as to

appeal to the surrounding community. One method that is currently popular is the survey method. Go door-to-door and take a survey in the community. Ask such questions as, 'what do you want in a church?' Take the answers and make the church fulfill those wants. Brethren call this the "church growth movement."

George Barna has popularized this approach in many of his books. In recent years several magazines and papers published by brethren have advertised Barna's works. They have recommended one entitled "**User Friendly Churches.**" Although some of Barna's material is interesting and helpful (his statistical tables, for example), he advocates a "market-driven church."

Many brethren have adopted the "market driven" philosophy. We say, for example, "If you preach longer than 30 minutes, you'll drive people away!" Or, "If you condemn specific sins or mention the denominations by name, you'll offend people and not convert them!" Brethren, whether we realize it or not, those attitudes are a pivotal part of the "market approach." We must alter our method of preaching, liven up our worship (cf., do away with the "old-fashioned" songs and replace them with modern ones that will appeal to the young people), and be careful to watch the clock to provide an atmosphere that will appeal to the community. The preacher becomes a salesman who must project a modern and appealing image to the community. Yes, brethren, in many places, we have succumbed to the allure of becoming "user-friendly churches."

MacArthur (p.xi) quotes Charles H. Spurgeon to this effect: "Everywhere there is apathy. Nobody cares whether that which is preached is true or false. A sermon is a sermon whatever the subject; only, the shorter it is the better."

**Although originally written over 100 years ago, doesn't that sound like the attitude in some local churches of Christ today?**

MacArthur goes on to say (p.xii): "Bad doctrine is tolerable; a long sermon most certainly is not. The timing of the benediction is of far more concern to the average churchgoer than the content of the sermon. Sunday dinner and the feeding of our mouths takes precedence over Sunday school and the nourishment of our souls. Long-windedness has become a greater sin than heresy." Many among us have adopted the "use whatever works" philosophy in the name of bringing people in and converting them. MacArthur says (p.xlii), "Traditional methodology - most notably preaching - is being discarded or downplayed in favor of newer means, such as drama, dance, comedy, variety, sideshow histrionics, pop-psychology, and other entertainment forms. The new methods supposedly are more 'effective' - that is, they draw a bigger crowd."

When we do things like building gymnasiums, we are trying to provide what people want in religion rather than standing for what the gospel says and teaches. He goes on to say (p.35): "There are thousands of supposedly evangelical churches worldwide that cannot stomach sound doctrine. They would not tolerate for two weeks strong

biblical teaching that refutes their doctrinal error, confronts their sin, convicts them, and calls them to obey the truth." What MacArthur sets forth in this book, and what I recommend for your consideration, is that this attitude arises from the market church growth philosophy, not from adherence to the non-negotiable terms of the gospel. For example, he quotes statements that he has found in church bulletins (p.47): "There is no fire and brimstone here. No Bible-thumping, just practical, witty messages." And, "You won't hear people threatened with hell or referred to as sinners."

"The goal is to make them feel welcome, not drive them away." "He (talking about their preacher, GCK) doesn't even use the 'H'-word. Call it Light Gospel. It has the same salvation as the Old Time Religion, but with a third less guilt." "The sermons are relevant, upbeat, and best of all, short."

Brethren, it would be naive to deny that we face some serious problems in local churches today. I believe that problems such as the "market driven approach" are the direct result of cultural influences. **We got these ideas from the world, not from God's Word. What is the solution? This may sound simplistic, but we must take a firm stand on the truth of God's Word and refuse to compromise.**

There are some things we may compromise without sacrificing any of the truth. We might change our service times to adapt to the needs of the community. On the other hand, there are some things we must not compromise for any reason. Our attitude must be, **"This is the truth of God's Word, and we are going to stand for what we believe to be right and in harmony with that Word!"**

In closing, I believe MacArthur expresses in a clear way the pressing need in many local "churches of Christ" in our day. "Fearless preaching is all the more necessary in such dangerous times. When people will not tolerate the truth, that's when courageous, outspoken preachers are most desperately needed to speak it." (p.35)

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**SUNDAY'S LESSONS:** Chris Benson will be our guest speaker today!