

# Are Seeker-Sensitive Churches Biblical?

*by Daniel Nuckols*

It seems as though everywhere you look in Christianity today, seeker-sensitive churches seem to be the new fad. Well-known evangelicals like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels are leading the charge of this movement, and one will find these churches springing up everywhere. These churches are all about large numerical growth. Driven by market analysis, these corporation-like churches offer programs, high energy worship services, and fun and games to draw more pagans to their church. This all sounds good and effective, right? However, there are problems with this model of a church.

The seeker-sensitive church brings about some very negative results by desiring to please men rather than God: a corrupted form of the gospel message, a manipulated definition of "church," and an under-"feeding" of true believers.

The seeker-sensitive church is more concerned about tickling people's ears with what they want to hear, rather than with the truth that is found in God's Word. This "feel-good" theology adds many to the church, but it does not result in much spiritual growth. The desire to tickle people's ears rather than telling the truth is not a new concept. Consider the story of Micaiah and Ahab in 1 Kings 22:1-28. Four hundred false prophets were encouraging Micaiah to tell King Ahab a favorable message: that Ahab would indeed win if he fought against the king of Aram. They wanted him to tell this regardless of whether it was true or not! Micaiah would not hear of it; he would not tickle Ahab's ear, he would only report to Ahab what God told him. Because of this, Micaiah was thrown into jail, and was only fed bread and water because it was not a message Ahab wanted to hear. When our desire is to please people first and foremost, like the four hundred false prophets, our message will be compromised, because God's truth revealed in His Word most of the time clashes with what unsaved people want to hear. Our goal should be to please God first and foremost regardless of the human praise (or hate) we might receive. *"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."* (Galatians 1:10).

Secondly, the most important message of Christianity, the Gospel, is often softened so it is acceptable to seekers. Rarely do you hear about God's wrath, the exceeding sinfulness of man, law, hell, and repentance preached from the pulpit. Why? Because these topics are offensive to the ears of pagan seekers. The human propensity is to enter through the broad gate and not through the narrow gate (Matthew 7:13-14). Again, pagans only want feel-good theology. So even the Gospel has to be changed, by leaving out the offensive parts, so it will be made acceptable to pagan ears!

Jesus did not soften His message to please people. Consider the story in John 6:53-65. Jesus said, *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:54). Many of His disciples left Him because this teaching was too hard for them to follow. Jesus could have explained to them that He was not talking about eating and drinking His physical body and blood, but He did not. Therefore, many disciples left Him because it was too hard to follow Him in this teaching. Jesus did this to weed out those who were not really committed to Him.

Seekers do not want to hear the hard parts of the Gospel: to repent and give Jesus the Lordship of every area of your life. They would rather just "add" Jesus to their life as a ticket to heaven, but live their life however way they choose. They probably signed a card, or prayed a prayer, but they are not really picking up their cross and following Jesus day by day (Luke 9:23). Seeker sensitive churches leave out the hard parts of the Gospel. Instead they mainly talk about one component of the Gospel: God's love. It is all about love, love, love. It is true that God is love, but He is equally just. The seeker sensitive Gospel message goes something like this: *"God loves you so much that He died for you! Did you know that you have a God-shaped hole in your heart that only Jesus can fill? Ask Jesus into your heart, and He will give you peace and happiness."* The problem with this message is that it is just not complete. It is true that God give us peace, and he loves us very much. However, He must punish sin. The Bible teaches that all lawbreakers will have their place in a lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). When one hears the complete Gospel message their response may be: "Wow Christ loves me so much, that He would actually die for me, a person that has broken His perfect law, who deserves His wrath, yet He gives me mercy and forgiveness at the cross, so I can receive Christ's righteousness? What a loving God!" But the problem is that they try to sell the benefits (peace and love) rather than teaching the whole story. Hence, modern churches have pews full of a lot of believers "adding" Christ to their lives, and not giving Him control of their lives.

Seeker sensitive churches want to fill their pews with non Christians to evangelize to them. It is true that God does save people by attending Church; I personally know some. For instance, a couple that was not married, but were living together, attended our church. God worked in their lives so they both gave their lives to Jesus, and then the married. However, when market-driven churches seek ways to draw the unsaved, many things change as opposed to biblically-based church services. Praise services turn into concerts. Sermons are shortened in the effort not to become "boring." All Scripture passages are on power point so no one needs a Bible anymore. Drama is used a lot to entertain people. All these things make the pagans feel good, entertained, and energized. But does it really help? Are the true believers getting fed? I would argue that many are not. Seeker sensitive churches have gotten to the point where they do all this stuff to draw in a large amount of people, but in doing so, they have changed the message of the God's Word so much that their church becomes meaningless. All their church has become is a place to meet nice people, hear a short, entertaining sermon, listen to a concert, and feel good about yourself that you went to a "church." If people dare to change the format and really start preaching God's Word instead of entertaining them, the pagans will leave. Hence, many of these churches are caught in a vicious circle. So the churches keep up their seeker sensitive programs to look good numerically in the eyes of men. Instead of the church meaning "a body of believers," it now has been reduced to a building full of anybody having fun, and doing the Christian "thing".

The early church grew incredibly without any seeker sensitive programs (Acts 2:47). Biblically, the purpose of the church was to build up believers through the teaching and fellowship, communion and prayer (Acts 2:42-47). They then went out and reached those around them with the good news through evangelism and missions ( e.g. Acts 3). The apostles' primary focus was on feeding the believers spiritually. These spiritually maturing believers would then reach out to pagans and tell them of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But some would argue: *"but people are getting saved in seeker sensitive churches."* That is great; I would not doubt that some people are indeed getting saved in these churches. Others would argue, *"what about unity?" "Isn't this all so divisive?" "Isn't unity what the Bible teaches?"* It is true that the Bible does teach about the importance of unity (see Ephesians 4). The end does not justify the means. We should not use bad methods just because people get saved by them. Consider the Nazi Concentration camps. Just because God, in His rich grace and mercy, used some of these concentration camps to bring people to Christ, should we then build concentration camps to get people saved? This is an extreme example, but again, it shows you that the end result doesn't confirm the use of bad methods even if God is indeed saving people through them. We need to just faithfully obey what the Bible teaches us.

Unity is important, but unified about what though? The "what" is what matters here! Are we supposed to be unified with Muslims and Mormons because they teach about Jesus too? At what point do we dissent? Are we supposed to believe everything that the seeker sensitive supporters are saying just for unity's sake? We are not supposed to be unified on things that are not Biblical. For example, Paul gave strict warnings to the Galatians about accepting any other Gospel message that was different than the one that was preached to them. He said some harsh words about this: *"But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed."* (Galatians 1:8) False teaching always begins with a perversion of God's Word. The bottom line: we need to be unified on what the Bible teaches a church is, and confront those who want to change definition of a church into something that is not Biblical. No one likes to be confronted that what they are teaching is wrong; however, sharpening other Christians by encouraging them to follow what God teaches is Biblical. *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness"* (2 Timothy 3:16). But when we correct those who have veered of God's Word, we must correct in a spirit of love, *"speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ."* In doing this we build one another up and demonstrate the love of Christ to one another.

In summary, Seeker sensitive churches are growing incredibly by the numbers. Yet this is at the cost of becoming people pleasers, not giving the complete Gospel message, changing what it means to be a "church," and true believers' starving for some meat to grow up in Christ. Is this worth it for the numbers' sake? I don't think so.