Ten Problems with Seeker Sensitive Evangelism

Concerning the Seeker Sensitive Evangelism of Willow Creek Community Church, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Some Observations on the Booklet by Jane Williams (1997)

Some months ago, the Lord drew my attention to a booklet titled ***The Seeker Sensitive Service*** **(1997) by Jane Williams**, and, aware that there are problems with the Seeker Sensitive model of evangelism and *"doing church"*, I read through it…

There is a great deal that could be said about this booklet and the Seeker Sensitive (SS) method generally. If you have not already examined this subject to your satisfaction, then I hope you might find useful my following observations on the booklet, along with some pertinent quotes from others who have studied SS.

What is the Seeker Sensitive Method of Evangelism?

"In the seeker sensitive church, mission is the priority, at the heart of which is the realisation that lost people matter to God" **[Ed Dobson, quoted in JW, *The Seeker Sensitive Service*, p.8].**

It is, of course, true that unsaved people matter very much to God - and to Christians. It is not their stated desire for mission to unbelievers that is the problem with Seeker Sensitive churches, but the methods they use, and the consequent distorting of biblical doctrine, to achieve it.

What Do Others Say?…

> "Willow Creek was started by a team headed by Bill Hybels in 1975. Hybels' goal was to start a church that would be a comfortable place for unbelievers to hear the gospel … Every aspect of the church service is geared toward making unbelievers or 'spiritual seekers' feel comfortable and accepted" **[Got Questions, *What Is Willow Creek?*, (No Date),** https://www.gotquestions.org/Willow-Creek.html**].**
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> "Attractional churches design their services and programs in such a way as to 'attract' attendees. A primary focus of an attractional church is to attract congregants to worship services. The attractional church model, using the seeker-friendly approach, is often contrasted with the missional church model. Most modern megachurches grew to their current size by being attractional" **[Got Questions, *What Is An Attractional Church?*, (No Date),** https://www.gotquestions.org/attractional-church.html**].**
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> "Simply put, this model of church starts with the idea that 'normal' church is unattractive and can't bring in new people, so exciting new ideas must be implemented in order to get people in the door. Once people show up for the attractive and entertaining aspects, they'll eventually hear a gospel message and they'll 'accept Jesus in their hearts'" **[Steven Kozar, *Why the Attractional Church Fails to Deliver the True Gospel*, (08 March 2017),** https://www.themessedupchurch.com/blog/why-the-attractional-church-model-fails-to-deliver-the-true-gospel**].**

NB: The 'Seeker Sensitive' or 'Attractional' method of evangelism was, and still is, very popular amongst many American churches, though perhaps not quite so much amongst churches in the UK; but, following an internal report on the failings of its missions methodology, the website of Willow Creek Church [as of Sept/Oct 2023] appears (at least to visitors to its pages) to have removed any overt Seeker Sensitive content…

(I) Seeker Sensitive Does Evangelism Man's Way Rather Than God's Way

The primary problem with the Seeker Sensitive method of evangelism, as depicted in Jane William's booklet, and from which flows all the other problems with Seeker Sensitive churches, is that it considers evangelism from the wrong perspective. Instead of going to God's inerrant and infallible Word to learn how *God* would have us evangelise the lost, Seeker Sensitive tries to reach the unsaved - those to whom it refers as the *"unchurched"* - through man's fallible reasoning:

"When [CBC] wanted to break through evangelistic boundaries and touch people who didn't go to church at all, they spent a year reading, researching and deciding what to do before taking any action" **[JW, p.4].**

This church [CBC] may well have prayed and sought the Lord - in addition to *"reading, researching and deciding"*. But that is not mentioned; neither is it stated here what sources were used. In any case, the Bible itself tells us all we need to evangelise the lost; it gives us all the direction and instruction we need to reach the unsaved.

"[W]hat sort of service would be most likely to reach them" **[JW, p.4].**

No church service, *per se*, will reach the unsaved, and nowhere does the Bible tell us it will. In Acts chapter 2, Peter preached the Gospel and then *"the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:38-41,47). In Acts chapter 8, Philip *"went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them"* (Acts 8:6) then in verse 26 he was instructed by the Lord to *"go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza"* in order to bring the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39).

We see this same pattern throughout the book of Acts: the lost were brought to salvation through the disciples' preaching of the Gospel in their villages and town squares, and then they joined the local churches of believers. According to Scripture, church services are for the saved, and the preaching of the Gospel is for the unsaved.

"Churches that are most successful..." **[JW, p.6].**

Most successful in what sense? It is crucial that we distinguish between *numerical* growth and *spiritual* growth.

What Do Others Say?...

> "In my previous piece I asked if some churches are growing in numbers because people there may be hearing what they want to hear instead of what they need to hear – and the two are often poles apart. I did not suggest that there was anything wrong as such with large churches, but simply asked why the numerical growth might be taking place. Such questions are not inappropriate. The biblical prophets noted similar trends. They spoke of those prophets *[EMcD: as with those churches in our day]* who were always popular with the crowds. The trouble is, they were the false prophets. The real prophets of God were usually not just unpopular, but fiercely rejected and despised by the masses. I am not suggesting that a large church is made up of false prophets. I am simply saying that Christians and non-Christians alike can always draw a large crowd if they tell people just what they want to hear … But crowd size alone does not determine whether the message in fact is true, is of God, or is in fact worth listening to" [**Bill Muehlenberg, *A Major Rethink on Church Growth*, (31 October 2007),** https://billmuehlenberg.com/2007/10/31/a-major-rethink-on-church-growth/].

(II) Seeker Sensitive Uses Man's Terminology Rather Than God's Terminology

Throughout her booklet, Jane Williams refers to non-Christians as being *"unchurched"* rather than *"unsaved"* or *"lost"*. She repeatedly speaks of the *"churched"* and the *"unchurched"*; never does she speak of Christians and non-Christians, or believers and non-believers, the saved and the unsaved. Never does she speak of bringing the unsaved to the Cross of Jesus Christ, only of bringing the *"unchurched"* to church.

This overlooks the reality that being *"churched"* doesn't mean someone is saved; it just means they go to church. We're all familiar with the analogies that going to a stable won't make us a horse and going to McDonalds won't make us a hamburger, so neither will going to church make us a Christian. There are many people in church pews who have been *"churched"* all their lives, but they are not actually saved. They are church-goers; but they are not Christians.

Scripture does not speak of the unsaved as *"unchurched"*. The only thing this unbiblical way of thinking succeeds in doing is adding to the *"tares"* with the possibility of causing damage to the *"wheat"* (Matthew 13:24-30).

What Do Others Say?...

> "[T]o maintain standard Christian interpretations or meanings would limit attendance, so definitions had to change: not the saved and unsaved, but the churched and unchurched. Subsequently, even denomination titles have been removed and some [Seeker Sensitive] churches are simply known as campuses" **[Noah W. Hutchings, *The Dark Side of the Purpose Driven [SS/CG] Church*, (2005,7,8,11), pp.36-7].**

(III) Seeker Sensitive Says Man Seeks God Rather Than God Seeks Man

In her introduction, Jane Williams says, ***"The word 'seeker' might be misleading, as it suggests someone actively engaged in a search"*** **[JW, p.3]**.

She is right to query whether the unsaved are actively seeking God; the Bible makes it clear that they are not: *"And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee"* (Isaiah 64:6a); *"There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God"* (Romans 3:11).

Nevertheless, the thesis of her booklet is predicated on the mistaken belief that the *"unchurched"* (non-Christians/unbelievers/unsaved) *are* in fact seeking God, but that they will be put off from finding Him if the *"churched"* (Christians/believers/saved) do not adapt their church meetings to meet the cultural expectations of the *"unchurched"* (see the next section).

What Do Others Say?...

> "Man does not seek for God; it is God who seeks for man. Jesus said that plainly in John 15:16 and John 6:44. The idea of thousands or even millions of unbelievers really searching for the true God is an utterly unbiblical notion" **[Got Questions, *Should A Church Be Seeker Sensitive?*, (No Date),** https://www.gotquestions.org/seeker-sensitvie-church.html**].**

"You cannot and will not find the 'seeker sensitive' method of evangelism in Scripture – anywhere. As a matter of fact there is only one true seeker in Scripture. The true seeker is Jesus. Jesus even says … that He has come to SEEK and save the lost … He is the real seeker. The 'seeker sensitive' church uses Luke 15 as a major passage to justify their position. However, what they fail to understand is that in these fine parables the seeker always represents God, not man! The lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, represents man … We have to remember what happened after the fall. Adam and Eve were in the garden and HID themselves from God. Not only did they try to HIDE from God, but also they attempted to cover themselves with leaves. Notice Adam was not SEEKING; he was HIDING … Let's look at Adam's idea to cover himself with leaves. This did not work as a covering. Why? Because it was man's idea. Much like the seeker sensitive phenomenon, it appears to be successful but only in man's eyes. However, we read that GOD provided a covering for Adam and Eve" [**Pastor Brad Smith, *Hey Creekers, Let's Be Sensitive to the Real Seeker!*, (September 2003),** https://www.letusreason.org/Current36.htm**]**.

"[P]eople are seeking all right, people are seeking to have their ears tickled. They're seeking to be pleased, to be self-gratified, to have their ego stroked. How does God view this? In Amos 4:1 God talks about the comfortable pleasure seekers, the cows of Bashan and in no uncertain terms of what His opinion is of those seekers of pleasure. Or, see Numbers chapter 11 with the greedy grumblers that the people from the mixed multitude that came out of the exodus were whining and complaining … This is in stark contrast to the weeping publican in Luke 18:13 who was beating his breast saying, '*God be merciful to me, a sinner*' or the first and second beatitudes in Matthew 5 – those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn. That's the kind of seeker that God is looking for … the one who is covering their head in ashes and sackcloths so to speak and seeking forgiveness from God. That's really the only kind of seeker that God would answer … God is the one who is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad: A Sobering Look at the Church Growth Seeker-Sensitive Models*, (2003),** https://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/SC03-1029.htm**]**.

(IV) Seeker Sensitive Has the Mind of the World Rather Than the Mind of Christ

Finding out concerns and prejudices of the unchurched is crucial to the whole process" **[JW, p.4].**

This is quite a statement, but it has absolutely no Scriptural warrant whatsoever.

"We will only be able to build bridges from the church into the community if we know where the community is, in its activities and in its thinking" **[Margaret Parker, quoted in JW, p.7].**

Here, the *"churched"* (Christians) are effectively being encouraged to put off the *"mind of Christ"*, which the Bible instructs us to cultivate after salvation (see Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:16b; Philippians 3:13-14; and Colossians 3:9b-10), and put on once again the mind of the god of this world, in order to attract the *"unchurched"* into church and keep them there once they have come in.

But where is the Biblical injunction for this? Believers know exactly where unbelievers are in their activities and their thinking because every believer was once there too. A saved thief isn't encouraged to return to stealing to *"build bridges"* to unsaved thieves, a saved drug addict would be very unwise to resume drug taking to get into the *"thinking"* of unsaved drug addicts, a saved prostitute most certainly wouldn't want to engage in her former *"activities"* to witness to unsaved prostitutes, and neither do Christians need to think once again *"after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world"* (Colossians 2:8) to be able to preach the Gospel to the *"unchurched"* or to give an answer for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Rather, we can tell them that we too

have *"been there, done that, and got the T-shirt, but I can show you a better way".* Christians have been saved out of the world and the Word of God instructs us to stay out of it.

What Do Others Say?...

"The mind of the world is always the same things: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, the pride of life … the only place we should be socially comfortable is … in fellowship with other believers. Now, we have to be in the [world] but we shouldn't be comfortable. The world should make us uncomfortable" **[Jacob Prasch, *Recommended Servants in the Lord*, (09 April 2023),** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6SvGxVngEg&t=2641s**].**

"Your job is not to see sin from the point of view of the sinner. That empathy will not help people … and it will kill you. Your job is to stand outside all of the feelings and all of the muck and throw a rope. As soon as you start to think that you need to stand in the shoes of sinners, the game is lost … there is no rescue … they can't actually be born again … But today you are being told you are insensitive if you're not buying into that … [but] it muddies the Gospel and what you have is pluralism" **[Rosaria Butterfield, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*, (21 July 2023),** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMu0gCeDRgg**].**

[We are told that] "*'the secret of reaching unbelievers is learning to think like an unbeliever. The problem is, the longer you're a Christian, the less you think like an unbeliever. You have to intentionally learn to think like an unbeliever again … such as changing the … style of music that you use, the [Bible] translation you preach from.'* Maybe I missed something, but we read in Romans 8:6, *'to be carnally minded is death'* and we read that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We are told repeatedly in the Bible to *'put on the mind of Christ'* not the mind of the world. The mindset of the world is why the world is in the mess it is in. The Word of God tells us expressly that you cannot solve a sinner's problem until he or she first seeks the Kingdom of God – born again by faith in Jesus Christ. Are we now to believe that we first have to change sinners' circumstances and somewhere down the road they will be saved? **[Noah W. Hutchings, *The Dark Side of the Purpose Driven [SS/CG] Church*, pp.36-7].**

"[S]ociology and psychology take precedence over theology. Now that might not be the philosophy that they come out of the gate with, but that, I would say, is the end result. The ministry is driven by sociology, psychology, and felt needs … psychological diagnosis and terminology are preferred above biblical diagnosis and terminology … [but] the pagan thought is to be subordinate to scriptural truth, not integrated into scriptural truth … that's a good thing for us to keep in mind regarding the subject of integration" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*].**

Regarding the lost rich young ruler: "It is important to know that Jesus did not try to get into this 'Unchurched Harry's' mind. As a matter of fact, Jesus did not even start where 'Unchurched (rich young ruler) Harry' was. Jesus started with God's law. Whenever 'Unchurched Harry' did not respond it is important to note that Jesus did not sing a song or go into a drama that he could 'relate to'. Whenever 'Unchurched Harry' could not accept the spiritual teachings of Jesus, Jesus let him go away sad … According to 'Seeker Sensitive' rules Jesus did not 'do church' right … Surely even Jesus could have done something to entertain this guy … I am not interested in 'Getting in the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary'. But I am interested in the gospel getting into the hearts of 'Unchurched Harry and Mary' … Getting into the mind requires man's psychological philosophies. Getting into the heart requires the pure unadulterated Word of God that is living and powerful, judges the thoughts and intentions of man's heart, and equips 'Church Harry and Mary' for any work that God may have for them" **[Pastor Brad Smith, *Hey Creekers*].**

(V) Seeker Sensitive Says Church is for the Unsaved Rather Than for the Saved

"The church is in a time warp" **[JW, p.6].**

Or is it that the church is faithfully following God's order for church services/meetings/gatherings as laid down in the Bible? As far as I am aware there is nothing in God's Word which tells us that our church meetings are to be updated or revised in some way to accommodate the current, and transient, culture of the world.

"Most of church life is geared for believers ... we fail to recognize that people without this background find it difficult to identify with" **[JW, p.6].**

This is quite simply because church isn't designed for unbelievers; church is for believers. Of course unbelievers will *"find it difficult to identify with church life";* they are unsaved, they are unregenerated, they do not belong to the Church which is the Body of Christ and which consists only of the saved. If we were to attend meetings of *any* group, club, fraternity, society, fellowship, or body, for which we have no knowledge or experience of the subject concerned – be it the Institute of Civil Engineers or even a knitting circle - we would not be able to identify with the members of those groups, *until we become suitably qualified*. We accept this as the normal situation for every other single group in society, and, more tellingly, we accept it for all other religions - if we attended a service in a Muslim mosque or a Hindu temple (God forbid) we wouldn't dream of asking the adherents of these religions to reorganize their meetings for our benefit, yet the Seeker Sensitive model expects Christians to accommodate the requirements of non-Christians in our church services.

"Many aspects of our church worship, with which we are comfortable and familiar, create problems for the unchurched" **[JW, p.7].**

Jane Williams here lists some of the elements usual to most church services in a variety of denominations.

What she fails to consider is that *all* groups must necessarily be exclusive, in the sense that there will be qualifications, knowledge, understanding, practice, language, and experience required by and peculiar to that group. Many aspects of *any* group, club, society, or association will cause problems for those not a part of it (see above). But if we fulfil the requirements for membership and grow in knowledge and experience of the subject concerned, then we *will* become *"comfortable and familiar"* with all aspects of that group.

Surely she knows that the biblically non-negotiable requirement for joining the Church, the Body of Christ, is to hear and accept the Gospel, repent of our sins, and receive the Lord's salvation for our souls? *Then* we will be able to participate in church worship and all that that entails.

None of the elements of church worship as laid down in Scripture are meant for the participation of unbelievers anyway. The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, can only be taken by believers. The Lord does not accept the prayers or 'worship' of unbelievers (see below). We have no biblical authorisation for adapting any aspects of church worship that are a *"problem"* for the *"unchurched"*. The good news of the Gospel is that unlike most other groups in society, *anyone* can be qualified to be accepted into the Church if they simply believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and accept what He did for them on the cross.

"The needs of those targeted for outreach are of prime importance, they should not be expected to fit our mould" **[JW, p.8] …**

"The local church needs to be helped to see the need for mission and to understand what sort of church is needed for unbelievers" **[Ed Dobson, quoted in JW, pp.8-9].**

It follows from this, therefore, that the *"unchurched"* (the unsaved) should determine – or at the very least influence - the manner of church services. Thus, much of Jane Williams' booklet is concerned with discussing how the *"churched"* might adapt their church services in accordance with the desires and expectations of the *"unchurched"*.

Most churches are very aware of the need for missions to unbelievers, the unsaved, the lost - they always have been aware, and they support and promote missions of varying kinds. But *no* sort of *"church is needed"* – or even biblically possible – *"for unbelievers"*. The purpose and function of the Church is to teach, edify, encourage, exhort, and build up the (saved) Body of Christ, and local church meetings are for believers to worship God in hymns and prayers, the reading and expounding of the Scriptures, and the sharing together of the Communion Supper. Then, 'fed and watered', believers can go out and preach the Gospel, and the Lord will add *"to the church daily such as should be saved"* (Acts 2:47b).

The *"unchurched"* are *not* members of the Body of Christ and so cannot have any part in these aspects of our church gatherings. Neither, scripturally, are they allowed to. God says the offerings - of any kind - of unbelievers are unacceptable to Him: *"we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags"* (Isaiah 64:6a). Once the *"unchurched"* are saved, *then* they will join the communion of the saints and be able to participate in the various means of the worship of God. That is not to say, of course, that we cannot invite non-Christian family, friends, and neighbours to a church service, but that is the extent of their participation until they are saved. Scripture does not us to redefine Church worship to accommodate them.

See also the Apostolic letters to the New Testament churches, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

"Believers are challenged to value the needs of the unchurched to such an extent that they are extremely accommodating as far as having their own needs met – they worship mid-week" **[JW, p.9].**

Biblically the church meets on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7). Nowhere does Scripture tell the Church to change the day of worship for the benefit of unbelievers. Church services are for believers. The Gospel is for unbelievers.

What Do Others Say?...

> "The word *church* is a translation of *ekklēsia*, meaning 'called out' or 'assembly'. In the New Testament … a church is an assembly of baptized believers under the discipline of the Word of God. They are organized to carry out the Great Commission, the administration of New Testament ordinances, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. When a group of Christians today follows this example, it is a church in the biblical sense of the word. In the New Testament, Christians assembled as churches for fellowship, instruction, and worship, and to carry out the Great Commission" **[*The King James Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Note on Matthew 16:18].**

"A church, by definition, is a called-out assembly of born-again believers. Hence, by its very nature and by definition, members of a church are regenerate. There certainly are many religious clubs and institutions which are allegedly called churches. Yet, when most if not all members of liberal and apostate 'churches' are unregenerate, they hence are not truly a church" **[David H. Sorenson, *God's Perfect Book*, (2009), p.206]**.

"The church is made up of believers for the spiritual growth of the believers and the praise and worship of our Lord who saved us from our sins … According to Scripture – all church services are to be 'believers' services'. Lost folks are to be welcomed, but not made comfortable in their sins" **[Stuart L. Brogden, *The Church Cannot Out Perform the World in Cultural Entertainment*, (No Date), quoted at** https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/letterstotheeditor_p2.htm**].**

"[T]he ingathering of believers on the Lord's Day is for, first and foremost, the exaltation of the Lord and then secondly it's for the edification of the believer … the function and intent and design of what takes place on a Sunday morning service is not for the unbeliever … Certainly we want unbelievers to come to church, but we do not design our worship service, the preaching, the prayers or any aspect of it towards the unbeliever. We trust that God will use His word, effectively communicated and use that to change the heart of unbelievers, according to His purpose, and according to His plan, and according to His God-ordained means, which he has spelled out clearly in Scripture … the ingathering focus of believers to worship God and to lift up God and to be sanctified and edified by the preaching of His Word and by God-honoring music" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

"God has not been vague on what His church is to be like … the seeker movement has missed the mark completely with its man-centered focus … When it comes to issues like kindness, speaking respectfully, or even physical comfort, all who enter the church should be treated well. But the unsaved person should never feel 'at home' in church, which is the body of Christ. The preaching and teaching of truth should make him feel very uncomfortable as he, hopefully, realizes the state of his soul, comes to know the existence of hell, and recognizes his need for the Savior. This discomfort is what brings people to Christ, and those who attempt to circumvent discomfort are not being loving" **[Got Questions, *Should A Church Be Seeker Sensitive?*]**.

"**QUESTION:** [W]hat is your perspective on what a biblical church ought to be? **ANSWER:** The church is a place where believers come together to study the Word, to worship the Lord, and to break bread … They came together to be edified … And they came together not to proclaim the gospel, generally … If you can get your unsaved friends to come to church, okay well then let's give them the gospel. But the main function of the church was edification for the believers and worship of the Lord. Exposition of the Word of God … it was for teaching and ministering and helping one another. [Then] they went out into their neighborhoods. Their friends or their acquaintances. They won people to Christ out there and then they brought them in. They became part of the church … But the seeker sensitive, seeker friendly churches [have] got that reversed. They're trying to bring the lost in and then alter their church … alter the structure so that they're watering down the word of God. They're not doing the things that are necessary for edifying, for discipling, for training people up, for encouraging maturity in the Word of God … they're dumbing it down [in order] not to offend the lost that come in … So it's set up and structured and presented in order to somehow not offend the unsaved" **[The Berean Call, *What is the Biblical Way of 'Doing' Church?* Q&A Session, (01 August 2004),** https://www.thebereancall.org/content/what-biblical-way-doing-church?**].**

(VI) Seeker Sensitive Uses the World's Culture Rather Than the Bible's Culture

There is much that can be said in response to the numerous comments and suggestions made by Jane Williams (and SS) concerning the world's culture vs the Church's culture, but I have here just picked out a few quotes from her booklet and overlooked the rest in the hope of keeping this section as brief as possible…

"There is a huge chasm between [the world's] culture and the church's culture" **[JW, p.6].**

Of course there is! The world and the Church are spiritually dichotomous. The world's culture is unsanctified; it is of *"the spirit of the world"*, while the Church's culture is born anew of God; it is of *"the spirit which is of God"* (1 Corinthians 2:12). The unsaved man *"receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14), whereas for the Christian *"old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17b). The world and the Church are going in opposite directions: The world is heading for hell; the Church has been called out of the world (Revelation 18:4) and is heading for heaven. There is no common ground between them. There never will be nor can there be.

"Many evangelistic Christians are basically out of touch with broader culture and have become isolated on their own little world" **[JW, p.7].**

Really? Is this so? How does she know this? On what grounds is she making this assumption? That there is a *"huge chasm between the world's culture and the church's culture"* and that Christians are not to entertain the *"activities and thinking"* of the unbelieving world, does not mean that Christians are *"out of touch"* with the world or *"isolated"* from it. There cannot be many Christians who do not engage with the world in at least some areas of their lives. Virtually every Christian has unsaved family members or friends, and/or works in a secular environment, and/or participates in a non-Christian activity, hobby, or interest wherein they are associating with unbelievers in some way.

"Our music, heroes, language and taboos are far removed from the unchurched community who have never heard of our heroes and who don't understand our language. We must learn the language and the culture of the unchurched" **[Ed Dobson, quoted in JW, p.7].**

As already discussed in the foregoing sections, Christians already know the *"language and culture of the unchurched"*; we have come out of it and have no commission from the Lord to return to it. Should 'A' level English students replace Tolstoy with *Janet and John* because 5-year-olds can't understand *War and Peace* or concert pianists not play Liszt because beginners haven't yet progressed beyond their scales? Should Christians *"do evil that good may come?"* (Romans 3:8b).

To reiterate the point made earlier, lack of knowledge and understanding applies to *any* person attending *any* group with which they are not familiar. Once someone is saved, they will soon grow familiar with the *"music, heroes, language and taboos"* of the Church, and, more so, as they grow in their walk with the Lord, they will *rejoice* in those things of which they once knew and understood nothing!

***"At Willow Creek, musicians … will play whatever they are asked to play … Experience has taught them that to try to mix the two styles of music in one service doesn't work, and damages both"* [JW, p.14].**

Jane Williams is right; it is indeed true that the world's music and the Church's music can't mix: *"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled. Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together"* (Deuteronomy 22:9-11). God hates mixture; our worship of Him must be pure.

As the unsaved (obviously) don't know any Christian music and therefore can't ask for it, Seeker Sensitive musicians acquiesce to the requests of the *"unchurched"* to play the world's music in God's House, not grasping that *"divers seeds"* (the world's music) defiles the *"vineyard"* (the Church) thus destroying our worship of God *"in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:23-24). If God did not accept the Israelites' defective worship of Him in the guise of the *"molten calf"* at the foot of Mount Sinai/Horeb (Deuteronomy 9:12,16,20-21; Acts 7:41), or the *"strange fire"* offered Him by Nadab and Abihu in the tabernacle (Leviticus 10:1), why do Seeker Sensitive churches - and Jane Williams - think God will accept the unsanctified music of unbelievers in His Sanctuary today?

This accommodating of the culture of the *"unchurched"* is the start of a very slippery slope to giving up Church worship altogether and replacing it with all worldly entertainment. The enemy of our souls may well want this in pursuit of his desire to water down the effectiveness of our Christian witness to the unsaved by making the Church indistinguishable from the world, but we are not to be deceived by him.

At some stage every Christian must take up their cross. How are *"seekers"* going to do that? They have been *"churched"* (not saved) with music and entertainment, little, if at all, different from that with which they have been very familiar and comfortable in the world; how and when are they going to be able to do a 180˚ turnaround to live the real Christian life, which is one of sacrifice, death to self, and very often suffering and persecution?...

For more discussions of Christian Music, please see the Music section of FBC's library.

What Do Others Say?...

> "In 1972 Bill Hybels … launched a ministry to high school students called *Son Life*. As the group grew the students in the group complained that there were several hindrances to them bringing their friends. Some of these hindrances were the meeting environment, the music, and the teaching. As a result of these complaints … [Hybels] started something called *Son City* in 1973. *Son City* began as an outreach program to unbelieving youth … over time, the message, music, and environment, and teaching were all adapted to the audience, and it was filled up with unbelievers. Then sadly what happened was that *Son City* became Willow Creek Community Church" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

> "The idea here is don't offend the seeker, don't offend the unbeliever. Let me state this in response, let me state it as emphatically and as unequivocally as possible: *Salvation is impossible without intense discomfort! Without intense offence, and intense guilt. And if a man does not come to understand his wretched condition as a sinner in the hands of an angry God, he is lost*" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

> "When you use entertainment to draw young people, you're going to have to use entertainment to keep them, and the world will always put on a better show … You want to draw young people? Tell them the truth" **[Jacob Prasch, *Woe to the Pastors*, (19 January 2023),** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SoQUplohZc&t=164s**]**.

"The problem with the 'seeker sensitive' church is that it tries to compete with the [world's] culture on the [world's] culture's terms and values, neglecting the Biblical mandate that the church be 'salt and light' – different from the sin-saturated culture … We cannot out-perform the lost world in cultural entertainment methods or styles … Nobody ever was saved by 'spiritual entertainment' … A service that only provides such … never has nor ever will bring a sinner to repentance and the salvation that comes from being truly reborn in and by Christ Jesus" **[Stuart L. Brogden, *The Church Cannot Out Perform the World*].**

"[SS] methodology seems to multiply the number of almost-converts who dabble in spiritual matters until they are no longer amused, and then fall away without ever coming to authentic faith in Christ" **[Phil Johnson, *Still Not Clear On the Concept*, (22 October 2007),** teampyro.blogspot.com/2007/10/still-not-clear-on-concept.html**].** "[T]here are many who seek a form of religion, and if the goal of the seeker-friendly churches is to fill seats with these people, it appears to be working … Sadly, many of these churches are flourishing … because they have reshaped the gospel into the kind of 'product' buyers are willing to tolerate … these churches have placed the focus on man, not on God where it belongs. And God's Word cannot be recast to conform to the needs of a consumer-driven culture" **[Got Questions, *Should Churches Be Seeker-Friendly?*].**

"Jesus did not engage culture; He engaged sinners who needed to be ransomed … Where in the New Testament are we told that the Church is to change; that the gospel is to change and find a new identity in culture in order to reach that culture? Since we live in a fallen and broken world, all cultures are comprised of unsaved people dominated by Satan who is the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30). Until Jesus comes again there will always be a tension between cultures on the one hand and the gospel and the church on the other …" **[Paul Smith, *New Evangelicalism: The New World Order*, (2011), pp.120,152].**

"A time will come when in the pulpits instead of having shepherds feeding the sheep we are going to have clowns entertaining the goats" / "The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing than hinting to the church that part of their mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. Beware of the leaven of worldly pleasure, for its working is silent but sure, and a little of it will leaven the whole lump. Keep up the distinction between a Christian and an unbeliever and make it clearer every day **[Charles Spurgeon].**

For further comments by others on music and entertainment in the Church, see the item ***Entertainment and Contemporary Music in Church Services*** appended to this article.

(VII) Seeker Sensitive Adheres to Church Growth Rather Than to the Bible

The quote that *"mission is the priority"* by Ed Dobson at the start of my document notwithstanding, Seeker Sensitive evangelism appears, sadly, to have fallen prey to the Church Growth Movement - certainly as it is discussed throughout Jane William's booklet.

The Church Growth Movement took its inspiration from a man called Peter Drucker (1909-2005) who was not a Christian but a secular business guru. Robert Schuller (1926-2015) expanded on Drucker's philosophy, removed the *"unchristian, uncouth strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition"* **[1]**; i.e., the *biblical* method of evangelism - and established the 'Attractional' model in many US churches. But coming to church is not coming to Jesus. Sweeping hoards of the *"unchurched"* into church services on a Sunday is not the same thing at all as preaching the Gospel to unbelievers who need personal salvation.

"Is it possible to attract people to the Christian faith today, in the sort of numbers that we need?" **[2]**. This raises a further question: *"need"* for what? Every unbeliever needs personal salvation; that is why the Gospel is

preached. But this speaker did not say that. The paragraph of which his comment is a part concentrates on the Church's need for members; for *"new growth and new life"* **[2]** of the *Church*.

The goal of the Church Growth Movement (of which Seeker Sensitive is merely one component) is to add vast numbers of people to the Church in order that the Church can bring about God's Kingdom on earth, then hand it over, restored to its Edenic state, to the Lord Jesus when He returns to the earth at His Second Coming.

Hence, in this thinking, corporate *"churching"* of the *"unchurched"*, rather than the salvation of the individual, is necessary in order to achieve the numbers required to form *"God's endtime army (Joel's Army) that will march through the land to victory";* the ultimate aim of evangelism here being *"the establishing of the Kingdom of God apart from Christ's return"* **[3]**.

[1] Robert Schuller, *Christianity Today*, October 5, (1984), pp.12-13, quoted at Kozar, *Attractional Church.*
[2] Sandy Millar, *The Alpha Course*, (1994) Video I.
[3] Tricia Tillin, *Mainstream*, (Summer 1994), p.8.

For more information on the Church Growth (also Emergent Church) Movement, and its concomitant doctrines: Restorationism, Kingdom-Now, and Dominionism, please see the Discernment section of FBC's library.

What Do Others Say?...

Bill Hybels was greatly influenced by Robert Schuller: "In 1975 … Hybels linked with Robert Schuller's leadership conference and they've been coupled together ever since" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

"The theology of this philosophy rejects the sinfulness of man in favor of the corporate physical needs of society. The [Church Growth] model ushers in a new reformation based on behavior rather than beliefs; deeds rather than creeds; and what the church does rather than what the church believes" **[Paul Smith, *New Evangelicalism: The New World Order*, (2011), p.111]**.

"In a recent *Christian Post* article, Hybels once again revealed the humanist nature of the infamous seeker-sensitive church growth movement by posing the question: *'Do we still believe the local church is the hope of the world?'* … I would ask: Is that were your hope lies – in the local church? Do you believe your church can save the world? Did it save you? … There are a lot of misguided Christians today who have a misplaced faith and hope in their church. This makes them easy targets for church growth consultants … The result is that we end up depending on them and their programs, techniques, strategies and surveys instead of God and His Word. But the Church cannot save. The Church IS the saved … With one little question, Bill Hybels took his audience's attention and focus off of Jesus Christ – a lost world's only real hope – and placed it on a group of mere mortals" **[Paul Proctor, *Are You A Church Worshipper?*, (11 August 2009),** https://newswithviews.com/PaulProctor/proctor186.htm**]**.

"Can the Church borrow the marketing tools of the world and apply them to the Church? … [The leadership of the Church Growth movement] were discipled by business management guru Peter Drucker, who was attracted to the megachurch movement as a social phenomenon that could bring about his *'new society'* … Megachurch pastors … acknowledge Drucker (who professed not to be a Christian) as their mentor and have built their organizations upon his secular business management philosophies rather than [upon] the foundation of Jesus Christ. The fruit of these movements is great compromise of the Gospel and the Great Commission" **[Elliott Nesch, *Church of Tares*: Purpose Driven, Seeker Sensitive, (28 September 2014),** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9y9ly6YvCw&t=5s**]**.

"Was Jesus interested in increase, or in sincere followers of the truth? … Jesus told [His disciples] hard statements and parables they could not understand unless they were spiritually minded and pursuing the truth … He, in fact, lost more [members] than He gained. If you preach the truth uncompromisingly you will not gain as many as you will lose … God is interested in making quality Christians, not quantity church members … the Gospel will ALWAYS be *'offensive'* to more people than it will attract (1 Corinthians 1:18,23-24). Too many are convinced they have no significance unless their numbers are mega church size. Nowhere do we find in the New Testament a church being commended for its numbers, but for its maturity. This was often measured by its endurance and sustainability through trials and persecution, not how large they were … numbers are good when God adds them, but they should not be pursued. In Acts 2:41-43, *'the Lord added to the church daily.'* The reason is because they were learning about Christ, they were learning what we now have as the Scripture" **[Mike Oppenheimer, *The Growth of a Purpose Driven Church*, (2009),** http://www.letusreason.org/Popteac24.htm**]**.

"Jesus is not coming FOR a triumphant Church; He is coming WITH a triumphant Church … to establish His Millennial Kingdom. HE will crush Satan under our feet. The Church does not conquer Satan before Jesus comes" **[Jacob Prasch, *Recommended Servants in the Lord*]**.

For further comments by others on the Church Growth Movement please see the item ***The Church Growth Movement*** appended to this article.

(VIII) Seeker Sensitive "Experiments" Rather Than Obeying God's Word

***"The church membership needs to understand the necessity to experiment and take risks, recognizing that not everything that is attempted is going to work out"* [JW, p.9].**

It certainly won't *"work out"* if it's done man's way or if it's not biblical. Where does the Lord Jesus say we must *"experiment and take risks"* in our methodology when bringing the Gospel to the lost? Where do the apostles and the early church practice this? Nowhere.

***"Where seeker sensitive services have failed, it has usually been because of lack of preparation, of the congregation not sharing the vision and having ownership of the venture"* [JW, p.10].**

Seeker Sensitive fails not because of *"lack of preparation … vision … or ownership of the venture"*. It fails because it is not biblical. It fails because it is disobedient to Scripture. It fails because it is trying to grow churches man's way instead of God's way.

(IX) Seeker Sensitive Preaches Pragmatism Rather Than Truth

***"Most people make the transition from a secular to Christian view of the world gradually. The experience of Willow Creek has been that secular society asks the question, 'Does it work?' rather than 'Is it true?' Bill Hybels … offers a practical approach to the search for truth. If people can't 'accept the whole package', he challenges them to take on board Biblical teaching about a certain subject and see if it works … This is considered to be a significantly different approach in proclaiming the gospel. People are asked to 'try it' while considering whether or not they can 'believe it'."* [JW, p.16].**

Where in the Bible does Jesus suggest unbelievers *"try"* the Gospel? No, the biblical way of evangelizing the *"unchurched"* is to preach the *"offence of the cross"* (Galatians 5:11b) → whence the Holy Spirit will convict of sin → leading to repentance → salvation → and joining the Christian Church.

"Trying it" and *"mak[ing] the transition … to a Christian view"* does not equate to coming under the conviction of the Holy Spirit when confronted with our sinful and lost state, repenting, and receiving new life in Jesus!

Even making 'converts' is not biblical; the Scribes and Pharisees made 'converts' (proselytes) but the Lord slammed them as hypocrites, because they succeeded only in making such proselytes *"twofold more the child of hell than yourselves"* (Matthew 23:15). The Biblical way is to preach the Gospel to the unsaved, and when they are saved, they become members of the Body of Christ, they join their local church and therein are discipled in the Faith (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 5:12-6:3).

*Please see the item **Biblical Models of Evangelism and 'Doing Church'** appended to this article.*

What Do Others Say?...

> "The question: *'Does it work?'* or *'Will it work?'* is asked. Numbers and crowds define expertise, credibility and worth. I would say this is tied into one of the root sources of this movement … drifting away from the clear pattern that God has given us in regards of an illegitimate lust for success … in the form of big numbers and big churches, and, men, what is our job? Is our job to fill the pews, or is it to fill the pulpit? Should we be more concerned with how many or more concerned with what kind? … shouldn't we be at least far more concerned with what kind of people we have – what kind of believers we have than how many people are filling up the church? … as you pastors … preach the word of God, and give the truth to your people you'll create a biblically literate sanctified congregation … what God has told us in the New Testament is very clear. He's given us marching orders that we don't need to remarket or add to. He's told us to preach the word (2 Timothy 4:2). *Preaching is the God-ordained means of dispensing grace or disseminating His truth* … Brothers, I would just say, be an alert watchman, warn people of the wrath of God to come, and present the good news of our Savior. Present it in an un-defiled, un-remarketed, un-cleverness of speech, un-persuasive words of wisdom manner" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

> "Jesus says that no one comes to the Father except through Him … I can only proclaim the gospel. I do not have the power to convince anyone to follow Christ … How am I going to convince someone to change his or her whole spiritual orientation? Well, I don't have to and I cannot … when I proclaim the gospel message, many hear … then … the Holy Spirit gives the effectual calling to the heart of man … the only job that these apostles had was to share the message of Jesus Christ and let the Spirit call these people through the Word of God … Paul reminds us … that it is through the foolishness of preaching that God has chosen to work … [and] that faith comes by hearing the Word. Since we are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves (man's philosophies and methods included), if the Word is not proclaimed, faith does not come…" **[Pastor Brad Smith, *Hey Creekers*]**.

(X) Drinking the Tea: Deception & Discernment

Is it possible to just accept the good bits and eschew the bad bits of the Seeker Sensitive model of evangelism and *"doing church"*? Well, can we drink the tea and spit out the milk or is it impossible to separate the two?...

Before He returned to heaven, when asked by His disciples what would be the sign of His return and the end of the world, the Lord Jesus instructed them to *"take heed that no man deceive you … many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many"* (Matthew 24:1-44; 25:1-13). Paul likewise warned the readers of his letters: *"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [apostasy] first"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

The Lord warned His disciples against being deceived four times more than He warned them of any other sign of His second coming, thus it behooves us to not just accept every new thing that claims to be "good", but to be careful to test it and prove that it *is* so (Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). During the course of telling one of His parables, the Lord asked - almost rhetorically - if He would *"find faith on the earth"* when He returned (Luke 18:8). As we see the 'dumbing down' of worship and of the preaching of the Word in so many churches today, we surely need to take His words very seriously. And thus, in these last days before the Lord Jesus returns to set up His eternal millennial Kingdom on the earth, it is absolutely essential that local churches cultivate discernment amongst the Christians in their congregations.

It is necessary to ask the question here, is Jane Williams saved, or is she merely *"churched"*? That may seem harsh, but in a Christian publication we should surely expect to see at least *some* biblical terminology, *some* mention of the Lord Jesus, *some* scripture references, and *some* talk of the salvation of the lost, yet there is virtually nothing in this booklet. The entire thrust of her discussion is on the push for Church Growth and the willingness to use any means, regardless of a lack of biblical justification, to achieve it.

The problem is that such a lackadaisical attitude to God's Word can lead to believers being *"beguiled"* by the enemy and *"corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ"* into receiving *"another Jesus … another spirit … another gospel"* (2 Corinthians 11:3-4).

Sadly, this is precisely what has happened in many Seeker Sensitive style churches.

Praise God that, despite such misguided attempts to 'improve' upon God's perfect method of evangelism and *"doing church"*, He has promised that *He* will build His Church, upon the Rock of the Lord Jesus Christ, and *"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18).

What Do Others Say?...

> "When people go away from the teaching Jesus gave the apostles that are written down in the New Testament [as does the Seeker Sensitive model of evangelism and "doing church"] they cause a division in the Body" **[Jacob Prasch, *Recommended Servants in the Lord*].**

> "[B]e discerning. The Bible often refers to the latter days before Christ's return where deception will run more rampant than ever. We must be discerning" **[Lighthouse Trails, *How to Find A Good Church*, (28 May 2018),** https://www.lighthousetrailsresearch.com/blog/new-booklet-find-good-church-cant/**].**

> "The sad reality is that this movement, which began with the intent and the motive to evangelise the lost, I would say emasculates true evangelism … when we add cleverness of speech, when we try to remarket, when we try to improve on the clear message of God, on the clear means of communicating that message, we're running the risk of making the cross of Christ void … Can the gospel be made to be inoffensive? Absolutely not … Not only did God un eternity past choose the most tortuous and most agonizing way

of death, He also chose the most offensive way of death. That the very God Who created the universe would die that death so that unsaved man could be saved and could be forgiven of their sins. And I would say this: *an inoffensive gospel is a false gospel.* Beloved, our great challenge is not to get the world to start liking Christianity. *Our great challenge is to get Christianity to stop liking the world*" **[Clay Miller, *Church Growth Gone Mad*]**.

"It seems as if the people promoting [Seeker Sensitive] have the right attitude toward the lost, but the wrong method for reaching the lost. I remember having a discussion with our District Superintendent in 2002 about evangelistic methods. I told him that I was going to try a new method that was practically unheard of today in churches in America. I distinctly remember pulling him closer to hear this 'new exciting method' … I will never forget the look on his face when I whispered, *'I am going to go into all the world and preach the gospel and teach people to obey everything that Christ commands, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'* When I asked him if he had ever heard of this method before, he just smiled. He knew what I was getting at. We need to get back to the Scriptures" **[Pastor Brad Smith, *Hey Creekers*]**.

Elizabeth McDonald,
7th October 2023 / 4th May 2024

bayith.org

Biblical Models for Evangelism and 'Doing Church'

For our purposes here, the two main examples of evangelism in Scripture are the sermons/talks given by Peter in Acts 2 and Paul in Acts 17. (See also Philip's evangelising of the eunuch on the road to Gaza in Acts 8:26-39.)

NB: John the Baptist's preaching was for a different purpose, so it is not included here.

(I) Peter's Sermon – Acts 2:14-40

Peter's sermon was given to Jews (the lost sheep / the prodigal son(s) of the House of Israel), who had been taught the Jewish scriptures from birth, so had some knowledge of them:

> "Peter … lifted up his voice, and said unto them *[Jewish unbelievers]* … hearken to my words: … Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:14,37).

> "Then they *[unbelievers]* that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them *[believers]* about three thousand souls … And they *[believers]* continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers … And they *[believers]*, continuing daily with one accord in the temple … with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people *[unbelievers]*. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:41-42,46-47).

Some Comments on Acts 2

The Centrality of Preaching the Word when Evangelising (Jewish) Unbelievers:

> "Peter … lifted up his voice … said unto them *[unbelievers]* … hearken to my words …" (v.14).

(i) Unbelievers were saved by receiving the Word:

- They received the ***Written Word***, which was:
  - the *sermon/talk* given by Peter, consisting of:
    - the *preaching* of the Scriptures, about:
      - the *prophecies* given in their Scriptures of/about "the last days",
      - the *historical witness* of King David of/about their promised Messiah,
      - the *doctrines* of/about the Messiah,
    - the *fulfilment* of the above now evident in the gift of the Holy Spirit,
    - the *promise* that this Gospel is for everyone: Jew and Gentile,
    - the *exhortation* to repent, to be saved, and to be baptized,
    - the *promise* that *if* they were saved, they would *then* receive the Holy Spirit.

- They received the ***Written Word Made Flesh*** :
  - the *doctrine(s)/facts* about the death and resurrection of the Messiah,
  - the *understanding* of His redemption of sinners,

- the *person* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(ii) Conviction of sin comes through the hearing of the preaching of the Word:

> "when they *[unbelievers]* heard this, they *[unbelievers]* were pricked in their heart, and said … what shall we do? … Then they *[unbelievers]* that gladly received his word were baptized" (vv.37,41a).

(iii) The new believers subsequently joined the local fellowship of existing believers:

> "and the same day there were added unto them *[existing believers]* about three thousand souls *[new believers]*" (v.41b).

From this passage, the biblical pattern for growing a local church (saving the lost) would seem to be that:

- the Word is preached to unbelievers,
- who are convicted by the Word they hear,
- who then respond by repenting of their sin; are saved and baptised (in water and in the HS),
- who then join the Church (worldwide believers) and their local church (local believers).

(II) Paul's Sermon – Acts 17:16-34

Paul's sermon was given to Gentiles (pagans) who knew nothing of the Jewish scriptures, the God of Creation, the promise of the Messiah, etc, and who worshipped "unknown" (false) gods:

> "And they *[pagan unbelievers]* took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean … Then Paul … said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:18-23).
>
> "God that made the world and things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth … is [not] worshipped with men's hands … the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead…" (Acts 17:24-31).
>
> "And when they *[unbelievers]* heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others *[unbelievers]* said, We will hear thee again of this matter … Howbeit, certain men *[unbelievers]* cleaved unto him, and believed" (Acts 17:32,34).

Some Comments on Acts 17

The Centrality of Preaching the Word when Evangelising (Pagan) Unbelievers:

The Athenians were pagans (similar to the situation we now face in 21st Century UK), who believed Greek philosophy and its concomitant teachings about evolution, and who were steeped in the culture and entertainment (bread and circuses) of their day, no differently from the "unchurched" (unbelievers/pagans) of

today, yet (a) Paul, just like Peter, preached the Word to these unbelievers; and (b) it was through the preaching of the Word that some of Paul's hearers believed and joined the church:

> "Then Paul … said, Ye men of Athens, … And when they *[unbelievers]* heard … others *[unbelievers]* said, We will hear thee again of this matter … Howbeit, certain men *[unbelievers]* cleaved unto him, and believed" (vv.22,34).

However, in place of Peter's historical and doctrinal recap to those who were already familiar with the Scriptures, Paul had to start his sermon right at the beginning by teaching the Athenians that the unknown god they worshipped was actually God the Creator, His purposes in creation, how and why He is to be worshipped, etc., and then, once he had laid the foundations, Paul could evangelise the pagans with the gospel of Christ:

> "Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (vv.2-23).

The Athenians were pagans, but they were still capable of understanding what Paul preached to them. He used no gimmicks, no 'relevant' attractions, no popular secular 'names', none of the world's culture to get them 'through the door'; he simply preached God's written Word to them (cf. 1 Corinthians 18,20a,23a).

Paul made just two short references to two of their poets; not for the purpose of 're-defining' the Gospel to make it more 'appealing' or 'palatable' to the Athenian pagans, but to correct the errors in their understanding of the "unknown God" whom they "ignorantly worship[ped]" [cf. 1 Corinthians1:20, 3:19a].

Similarly for us today in the pagan West, where evolutionary humanism is the default philosophy and the world's culture is now little more than degraded 'entertainment', we surely need to evangelise the lost, not by giving them more of what they already have in the world, but by giving them the foundational teachings of Creation as laid out in Genesis, preaching to them Christ crucified, and pleading with them to repent and be saved *"from this untoward generation"* (Acts 2:40).

(III) It is God Who Adds to the Church

> "And the Lord added to the church daily such *[unbelievers]* as should be saved" (v.47).

If God's People follow the Biblical pattern/mandate for evangelism, ministry, and worship, then God will bless His Church with new believers.

(IV) The Purpose and Function of the Church

> "And they *[existing believers and new believers]* continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers … And they *[believers]*, continuing daily with one accord in the temple … with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people *[unbelievers]*" (vv.42-47a).

Believers gained *"favour with all the people"* outside the Church (the "unchurched") through *"continuing steadfastly in":*

- the apostles' doctrine,
- fellowship,
- breaking of bread,
- prayer,
- meeting regularly in the temple/church together,
- being of one accord (i.e. of one mind in the things of God),
- visiting one another,
- exhibiting gladness, joy, good cheer,
- having singleness of heart (thoughts, reasonings, understanding, etc., [similar to being of one accord]),
- praising God (in spirit and in truth – see John 4:24).

In neither of these two passages on evangelism in Acts 2 and Acts 17 – whether to folks who have some knowledge of God, or to pagans who have no knowledge of God - is there is any mention of unbelievers even attending meetings of believers, let alone participating in them, and certainly not influencing them in the manner of Seeker Sensitive churches in any way whatsoever (that is not to say, of course, that we cannot invite unbelieving family, friends, neighbours, etc to a church meeting, but that is the extent of their participation until they are saved).

> "The word *church* is a translation of *ekklēsia*, meaning 'called out' or 'assembly'. In the New Testament it usually refers to a local group of Christians. In this sense a church is an assembly of baptized believers under the discipline of the Word of God. They are organized to carry out the Great Commission, the administration of New Testament ordinances, and the exercise of spiritual gifts. When a group of Christians today follows this example, it is a church in the biblical sense of the word. In the New Testament, Christians assembled as churches for fellowship, instruction, and worship, and to carry out the Great Commission" **[*The King James Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Note on Matthew 16:18].**

See also each of the New Testament letters to the churches, and Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

NB: (1) the "many wonders and signs" spoken of in v.43 "were done by the apostles"; this passage does not speak of signs and wonders being done by any others in the church; (2) the situation today regarding believers having "all things in common" is not so possible as it was then; (3) however, in many ways, believers still sell or give "their possessions and goods" or give of their time and money to help both other believers and unbelievers "as every man had need" in a variety of ways (foodbanks, fund-raising of various kinds for missionary and other church work, church boot fairs or jumble/book sales, charities, private philanthropy, etc.); (4) also remembering that Christians are not 'Joel's Army', and Scripture does not tell believers to 'take the world for Christ before He returns' (aka: Kingdom-Now / Dominionism / Triumphalism), but rather the opposite: Matthew 24:9; Luke 18:8b; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; Revelation 13:7.

Elizabeth McDonald,
30th January 2020
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See also: Ken Ham, 'Evangelism In A Pagan World', in *The Lie: Genesis – The Key to Defending Your Faith*, (Chapter 9, pp.113-128), Master Books, Arizona, USA, (1987/1999).