

## “WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET THEM IN THE DOOR”

A recent article online caught my attention. It seems that the First Baptist Church in Snellville, Georgia recently offered an opportunity for those attending services to win one of two \$500 gas gift cards. They had to add an extra phone line to handle all of the phone calls from potential church members in regard to the promotion. The “pastor” defended the giveaway by saying that they not only wanted to draw people in, but they also wanted to help meet people’s physical needs, and buying gas is one of those needs. The whole idea is rather pitiful, but largely representative of the religious climate of our day. What was even more interesting to me was the response of the one writing the article for AOL. I have no idea of the religious background or lack thereof of Tracy Coenen, but listen to a few of the excerpts he (or she) penned: “Church attendance is generally a good idea, but if someone has to offer a prize in order for you to show up, I think you’ve got problems. Are we really that pathetic of a generation?...If you have to create a gimmick, make the church service into an entertainment venue, or otherwise bribe people to show up, there is something wrong. Church is about faith and worship, not prizes and play.”

Many are under the impression that we must do whatever it takes to get people in the door, and then we can teach them the truth of God’s word. So now we see dramas, dance teams, children’s church, guys ripping telephone books in half with their bare hands, etc., in an attempt to create the big draw. The trouble with this philosophy is that whatever draws people is what ultimately will keep them. Many churches have borrowed from the marketing strategies of those in the business world. The time-share folks are great at giving away two or three night vacations in exchange for listening to their spill about some new condominium community. I will gladly take the free vacation, and suffer through the sales-pitch with no intention of ever buying into their offerings. The same holds true for these religious gimmicks: those who come for the gas cards or the entertainment might suffer through the service, but they have no intention of buying into the message. Are we so concerned about numbers that we would go so far as to backdoor people into the church? If you bring them in under false pretences, you had better be prepared to keep them under the same conditions!

I seem to recall the Lord saying that if people were unwilling to hear the Gospel message, then shake off the dust from your feet, and move on to those who will listen (Matt.10:14). Many evidently are content to continually “cast their pearls before swine” (Matt.7:6). If the story of Christ’s death upon the cross for our sins, the forgiveness of sins through his blood, and the hope of eternal life in heaven is not enough to draw men to the Lord, then no game, gadget or gimmick will ever be enough! Jesus reminds us that “the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). May we be content to lift up the crucified and risen Lord, and allow that

message to be heard from us and seen in us. Allow the Lord to draw others through the message of his death, burial, and resurrection: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

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