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## Pastoral Letter, September, 2017

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Growing up in Texas, my favorite season was the Fall. Not because of Fall colors; Texas had little of that. Not because of football, or pumpkin desserts, or peculiar holidays. There was one reason: it was getting cooler. The summer heat and humidity would soon break.

I still like the Fall for this reason and others, but added to those is a greater reason. Every year, the Fall season presents C4 with new opportunities to bring the hope of the gospel to others. Too often, we treat our evangelistic mission like a punishment rather than a privilege. Hopefully, evangelistic seasons help us to re-discover the privilege of being God's ambassadors to those who are without Christ, and so, without hope in this world (Ephesians 2:12).

Sadly, in our present age, the church largely depends on an attractional model of outreach. That is, the church tries to do things that appeal to the felt needs of unbelievers so that they will come to the church and stay there. So, for example, a church will host activities that unbelievers would like to do, usually some form of entertainment. Then, the church will try to convince them that the church is a fun community to be a part of. In order to be convincing, they avoid talk of those things that unbelievers may find offensive; things like sin, judgment, righteousness, moral absolutes. Instead, they emphasize things that unbelievers will like, such as the church as a social community, unconditional love, personal care, and material blessing.

The weaknesses of this model should be quite evident. First, we can't find this method of church-growing in the Bible. On the contrary, the church was quite bold to preach the whole gospel, a gospel that focuses on Christ crucified for hopeless sinners who deserve God's judgment. The church was not afraid of hurting the feelings of their hearers because they were so concerned for their hearers' eternal souls. Second, the attractional model suggests that the gospel itself—the gospel alone—is not attractive or sufficient for growing Christ's church. Such a church seems to think the pure word of God is not relevant to our modern culture, and therefore they must find some other way to win people. When the church acts as though something more than the gospel is needed to reach people, she reveals that deep down she is ashamed of the gospel.

Third, if a church depends on attractions to bring people into the church, it becomes increasingly difficult to discern whether those who come for membership or baptism are coming because they love and want more of Christ, or because they like the attractions and the community of the church body. This model has led to the current situation in the modern church where many nominal Christians claim to believe, even while their lives show no transformation, or who fall away from the church altogether.

Finally, perhaps the greatest weakness of this model is that the church positions themselves to be like the world. She tries to show the world that the church is a place where all people can be comfortable and have fun. To do so, the church must enjoy the things that the world does. When the church is like the world, the tragic result is that the church loses the distinctiveness that sets her apart from the world. The church's peculiar identity is what communicates the beauty of the gospel way of life. Without that, she is reduced to the irrelevance that caused her to seek worldliness in the first place.

In fact, God has given us the means to use in winning others to Christ. He has given us His Word, prayer, the ordinances (baptism and prayer), and He has given His Spirit to the church to empower our witness and our holiness. The biblical means of evangelism is for Christians to be so transformed and *different* from the world as we seek God through faith and repentance, that the beauty of the gospel shines through the church's distinctiveness. When the church is different from the world bored with all of her entertainment and pleasure-seeking, the church has an open door to proclaim the good news of the Savior who taken hold of us, rescuing us from sin and death, and transforming our lives by His grace.

May God in His gracious power cause us to live the gospel before our unbelieving world, and take the gospel to them with urgency and expectancy. May God use us to grow His eternal kingdom.

For the gospel of Christ,

*PASTOR HOUSE*