

Does the End Justify the Means in God's Work?

Pragmatic Evangelism

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II Samuel 6:1-7, "Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."

I Chronicles 15:13-15, "For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order. So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord."

At one of the meetings of the Capital Baptist Association in Oklahoma City some time ago an "expert" on Sunday School said that any method, whatever works, should be used to make our Sunday Schools grow. This pragmatic approach is quite popular; probably even the majority view in the churches today. In this message we shall consider this pragmatic philosophy in the light of God's word and as we do I shall try to answer the question, "Does the End Justify the Means in God's Work?"

THE INCIDENT IN OUR TEXT

Verses one and two of II Samuel 6 tell us that David desired to do a good work for the Lord. David was a great man of God. The Bible calls him a man after God's own heart. His first concern after becoming solidly established as King of all Israel was to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem. This was a wonderful intention on the part of David who had nothing in mind but the glory of God.

But David used the wrong method for doing this good work for the Lord. In Numbers 4, God had given instructions as to how His ark was to be moved. God's word said that the ark was to be carried by staves run through the holders on each corner of the ark and Numbers 7:9 said that these staves were to be carried on the shoulders of the priests. Numbers 4:15 warned that no one was to touch the ark of God, and that whoever did would die. God's will as to the method for moving the ark was plainly revealed in God's word.

David, however, used a different method for moving the ark than the one prescribed in God's word as we read in verses 3-5 of II Samuel 6. Instead of having the priests carry the ark by the staves over their shoulders as God had commanded, David had the ark loaded on a new cart and driven by Uzzah and Ahio.

In so doing David did not ask what God's will was in the matter. He acted without a "Thus saith the Lord." He introduced something into the work of the Lord without a "Thus saith the Lord." Instead of seeking God's revealed will David conferred with flesh and blood. I Chronicles 13:1-4 which relates the same incident says that David consulted with many counselors in this matter but not with the word of God.

David's counselors evidently advised him to follow the method of the pagan, uncircumcised Philistines in moving the ark. In I Samuel 6:7-8 when the the ungodly Philistines had sent the ark back to Israel after God had sent His judgment on them, these pagans had loaded the ark on a new cart and moved it. The advice David got from the leaders of Israel was patterned after the method of the heathen Philistines. So David attempted to do *God's work using pagan methods*. His motive was right, he was zealous to honor God, and he was deeply committed to doing so. But in the methods he used, David ignored the will of God as revealed in His word. David tried to do holy work utilizing secular methods.

Then verses 6-7 tell us that because of David's use of wrong methods his good work issued in tragic results. As the cart carrying the ark was rolling along it hit a bump and tipped the ark so that it started to fall. Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark to keep it from falling and when he touched the ark God struck him dead.

How terrible that Uzzah died! Wasn't he trying to serve the Lord? Didn't he mean well in trying to keep the ark from falling? Weren't his intentions good? Wouldn't the cart have gotten the ark to Jerusalem just as well as carrying it on the priest's shoulders?

The death of Uzzah pointed out the seriousness of David's error. David was shown here that good intentions do not justify bad actions. In God's work it is not enough to have a right motive. God's work must be done God's way. Uninstructed religious effort, no matter how noble or sincere, is unacceptable with God. God's work must be done God's way.

The seriousness with which God views this matter is seen in what He did to Uzzah. The Philistine way of moving the ark brought great anger from God. My friends, God means business!

David realized his error and in I Chronicles 15:13 he said "...the Lord our God made a breach upon us because we sought him not in the due order." God killed Uzzah because we did not inquire of God as to how He would have us move the ark, David said. David learned by painful experience that God's work must be done God's way.

David's love for God caused him to move the ark but the Lord has said in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments". Our love must be directed by God's commands.

One of the great things about this incident is that it had somewhat of a happy ending because David learned from his error and went back and tried again to move the ark, this time using the method prescribed in God's word. I Chronicles 15:15 describes it like this: "And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord."

THE APPLICATION OF THIS INCIDENT TO OUR WORK FOR THE LORD TODAY

First we need to understand just what the work is which the Lord has given His churches to do in this world. The will of God concerning His work is plainly revealed in His word. The Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the church, has given us in His Great Commission in Matthews 28:19-20, three things and only three things to do. We are to make, baptize and teach disciples.

Not only has the Lord given us this specific work to do, He has also, in His great wisdom and grace, also prescribed the method we are to use in doing this work. We need to carefully consider God's word to see what is His way of doing His work. The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed one specific method for doing His work in this world and that method is preaching. God has a specific message we are to preach (the gospel) and He has a specific method we are to use in spreading that message (preaching).

In the first chapter of I Corinthians the apostle Paul forever establishes the method we are to use in doing the work of Christ in this world. In verse 21 he says "for after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The Lord Jesus had earlier commanded His disciples in Mark 16:15 concerning the proper method for doing His work when He said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". To preach means to declare, to explain and to apply the gospel.

The Christ-ordained method for doing God's work in this world is preaching. The apostolic method for doing God's work in this world is preaching. The New Testament method for doing God's work is preaching. The Lord Jesus never used any other method. He never advocated any other method. Paul never used any other method. He never advocated any other method. Paul used this one method and he turned the world upside down for Christ. Nor did any of the other apostles ever use or advocate any other method. Nor did any of the early churches.

In I Corinthians 1:18, Paul says that the power by which God's work is to be done is preaching. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." The power of God for salvation is not in our own abilities nor in our own clever and innovative methods. It is in the preaching of the gospel.

The Bible is the only reliable guide for all our work for the Lord. In it God has not only told us what to do, He has told us how He wants it done as well. Yet, as plain and clear as God's word is about His work and His methods, our churches today are utilizing other methods, Philistine methods, to try to do God's work.

Some people think it is not really important how we do God's work, just so we do it. They think the method used is not really very important. Others place more emphasis on new methods of doing God's work than on the message. Many evangelism conferences today give more emphasis to methods than to theology. Many if not most methods now being used in our churches are a radical departure from the one method ordained by God in the scriptures.

Apparently it never occurs to some preachers to check how near or how far their methods are from the standard of God's holy word, just so those methods work! To many of today's pragmatic Christians, methods that work are more important than methods that are biblical.

When you ask these people why they use these non-scriptural methods they usually reply by saying that these new methods work! They do not answer with a "Thus saith the Lord." Sometimes when you ask people about their non-biblical methods they get a little testy and say, "Well, these methods work! They are getting people in! What you are doing is not working and what we are doing is and so we must be right!" And these people often refer disparagingly to churches which are true to biblical methods as "traditional churches."

A recent article in "Facts & Trends," a publication of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, quotes the pastor of a large Baptist church in Atlanta as saying, "Buses, budgets and buildings may have worked in the past, but they won't work in today's society". And then he goes on to say that we must find something else that will work.

Recently I received an advertisement from another church for something called the Festival of Christian Arts which was a workshop for Christian drama, puppetry, ventriloquism and clowning. On the front was a picture of a mime and the caption was "The Gospel; Some People Won't Listen!" The implication was that since some people won't listen to preaching today, we need to employ other methods for getting the message across.

Most of these modern methods end up downgrading preaching to an unimportant place or eliminating it altogether. In many of our churches instead of sermons we have slick, professional shows made up of worldly, Philistine entertainment. We have football stars and beauty queens and Hollywood stars and punk rockers and dummies and clowns and dramatists who take the place of the preacher.

Our church auditoriums today reflect that we are abandoning the God-ordained method of preaching. They are being built like theaters with stages and elaborate lighting and sound systems rather than with the pulpit as the focus. Many churches don't even have pulpits anymore.

A popular book among those who use the new methods in our churches is "The Baby Boomerang" by Doug Murrin. He says in reference to a multi-thousand dollar sound system that it has paid off in the salvation of many souls. It is as if the sound system was responsible for reaching souls! Poor Paul! He had no sound system at all! How was he able to turn the world upside down for Christ?

Someone has called this slide into show business in our churches today “evangelical burlesque.” Fleshly methods are used to appeal to the flesh in order to get people in but the problem with using the flesh to draw people is that once you get people in by appealing to the flesh, you have to keep feeding the flesh with bigger and better methods to keep them in. They just won’t stick if you don’t!

Here’s another popular innovative method used by a metro area Baptist church last year. They passed out tickets to young people that read like this:

“Admit two 7th-12th graders. Pizza Pigout. All the pizza and coca-cola you want. Special guests – Mike Gundy, OSU quarterback, Barry Sanders, Heisman Trophy winner. Win Twid’s Sporting Goods’ \$100 gift certificate. Event sponsored by (such and such) Baptist Church. Drawing will be between 7 & 8 pm.”

Many modern methods seek to be relevant to today’s culture in order to reach people. This is especially true in the area of music. Many churches today are using Philistine music in the worship of the Lord. The same article in “Facts & Trends” to which I referred earlier quotes the associate pastor of a California super church as saying, “We use contemporary music relevant to the culture...” Doug Murrin in “The Baby Boomerang” says the music in his church... “is designed to allow hearts to feel at home with the culture of our times as they hear the message of the gospel.” “These musical events have drawn hundreds to give their lives to Christ and have convinced us that music is one of the most powerful tools available to the church for reaching baby boomers,” Murrin goes on to say.

Evidently these innovators would have us adapt the work of Christ to the baby boomer culture. But the very last thing we Christians need to do is adapt or conform Christianity to our culture! What we really need to do is denounce the sins of our culture and call our culture, the baby boomers and everyone else, to repent before it’s too late!

In chapter two and verse two of his first letter to their church, Paul reminded the Corinthians that when he had first preached to them he did not try to adapt his preaching to the wisdom of the Corinthian culture. Rather he preached Christ crucified to them. And this was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks but it was God’s method for doing His work.

The real underlying problem in the explosion in the use of new methods today is that our preachers have lost faith in the power of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to save sinners. They mean well. They want to do God’s work and they want to see it prosper. They have the right motives but they don’t really believe in the power of preaching and so they have turned to using Philistine carts. Preaching, if it survives at all today, is little more than a sermonette sandwiched between a lot of musical performances and the sermonette is 97% jokes and stories.

Man cannot be reached by better methods. There is only one way he can be reached and that is by the drawing power of the Holy Spirit and He exercises that power through the preaching of God’s word. In God’s work what works is not the issue. Practical is not the issue. Scriptural is the issue!

The only scripture I have ever heard the pragmatists quote is what Paul said in I Corinthians 9:22 when he said, "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some." Just a passing consideration of this verse reveals, however, that Paul is obviously not making an absolute statement here. Surely he did not mean I will become an incestuous person so I can win incestuous persons. Surely he did not mean I will become a Philistine so I can win Philistines. This scripture has to be compared with and interpreted in light of other scriptures if it is to be rightly understood and it certainly does not mean that we are to use Philistine carts to carry the ark of God when God has told us to carry it with staves!

Just as tragic results came from David's use of the wrong method in doing God's work, so some tragic things have resulted in our churches today after thirty years of the use of Philistine methods. God will not tolerate the use of wrong methods by His people. The consequences of using Philistine methods in doing God's work today are dire indeed.

As a result of the use of unbiblical methods of getting people to profess Christ and get them into our churches we have churches full of fleshly, unregenerate persons with all the problems this brings. We have gotten a lot of people into our churches but what have we really got? Worldly, unspiritual people who crave unspiritual things. We have more inactive members than active members. We have people who want to criticize and fight and who follow every wind of doctrine and who are full of pride that makes them want to dominate the church and to run the preacher off. We have people running from church to church, moving their memberships, seeking they know not what. I heard not long ago about how a group of 200 teenagers left one super church and joined another en masse because they liked the youth program better at the new church.

The use of these new methods in God's work has cheapened and corrupted the gospel message until it rarely receives a serious hearing. The gospel is wounded in the house of its friends today, someone has said.

Preachers who use worldly, unbiblical methods will be called to account some day at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This judgment of which we read in I Corinthians 3 is primarily for preachers of God's word. This is what the context indicates. These new unbiblical methods are part of the wood, hay and stubble that will be burned up as a result of this judgment.

CONCLUSION

Does the end justify the means in God's work? Is it true that we should use any means whatsoever to do the work of the Lord and get people saved? Does it really matter what methods we use to do God's work? Does God care what methods we use just so we do His work? Does the gospel of Jesus Christ need new methods to make it attractive to modern man and to the baby boomer generation?

The answer of God's word, we have seen, is *NO!* The end does not justify the means in God's work. God's work must be done God's way if it is to be acceptable to Him. "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams," the scripture says in I Samuel 15:21-23.

But what are we going to do to reach 21st century man? What are we going to do to reach the baby boomers? The same thing the Lord Jesus did to reach the people of His day. The same thing the apostle Paul did to reach the Roman world of his day. The same thing men of God have done in every age. "Preach the word. Be instant in season, out of season."

What shall God's people do in the face of the pragmatism that is so widespread in our churches today? Let us do what David did after the tragic results of his use of Philistine methods. Let us try again and this time let us be faithful to God and obedient to His word. Let us preach the gospel and depend on the Holy Spirit to save sinners. Let us remember what our Lord has told us in John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life."

But what if God's method is not popular with the baby boomers? God's message and method are not popular with men today. They are not popular with the baby boomers. But they never have been and they never will be popular! The cross is an offense to the flesh; always has been and always will be. Preaching is foolishness to the flesh; always has been and always will be.

No matter how different we may be considered for doing so we must be faithful to God's word because this is what God requires. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "Moreover it is required in stewards (referring to preachers) that a man be found faithful" and faithful means doing God's work and doing it as God has commanded it to be done.

We do not know better than God how His work should be done! God knows what method is best for spreading His gospel and reaching people. My friends the gospel has not lost its power! The Holy Spirit has not become impotent! The world has not become so powerful that God's work needs redesigning and reoutfitting with new methods! Let us learn from reading and obeying God's word what David found by sad, tragic experience: that God's work must be done God's way!