

The Church Growth Movement

An Analysis of Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven" Church Growth Strategy

by Dennis Costella

©FOUNDATION Magazine, March-April 1998

AFTER PERSONALLY covering the Saddleback Community Church "Building a Purpose-Driven Church" seminar held in Southern California this past January, it became clear to me that some of today's most influential religious leaders misunderstand and misrepresent the true purpose of the church today. Dr. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church and director of the "Building a Purpose-Driven Church" workshops, has influenced thousands of churches during the last decade that are interested in the "Church Growth Movement." Without doubt, every church in the United States must give, or has already had to give, an answer to the strategies of building a superchurch. Sadly, many have already jumped on board. The possibility of dynamic growth for struggling churches, especially old-fashioned, Bible-believing, Bible-preaching fundamental churches, is tremendously appealing. However, it is imperative to ask this question: "What actually must be done in order to accomplish dynamic church growth?" We must warn about Rick Warren's unbiblical answer to that question.

The purpose of this report is not to warn or challenge mainline denominational churches or middle-of-the-road evangelical churches to accept Biblical principles regarding church growth and to gain a proper understanding of the very nature of the church. No, these groups are already committed to a course of compromise. It is not surprising that the vast majority of liberal and New Evangelical churches today readily fall for the superchurch growth strategy, for they vehemently reject Bible separation and have long since adopted theologies and ministries that do not insist upon contending for the Faith or for the inerrancy of Scripture. The Biblical counsel we would give to one who might find himself in such a church is to come out of it and follow the Lord's leading to a solid, Bible-believing, Bible-preaching, separated and militantly fundamental church.

The purpose of this report is, however, to exhort and encourage those churches that are attempting to maintain a strong, fundamentalist testimony. Our burden is for churches that are trying to stay true to the Lord and have experienced little or no growth through the years as a result of their stand for the truth. The temptation to incorporate some of the techniques of the dynamic church growth model is great. Who does not want to reach more people, draw a larger crowd or be more effective in ministry? Nevertheless, the question that every Bible-believing Christian and fundamentalist pastor should ask is "What must be sacrificed in order to gain more members and become a 'superchurch'?" After observing and evaluating the Saddleback Seminar, we firmly believe that if the "Purpose-Driven Church" model is to be followed, then fidelity to the Lord and His Word must be sacrificed in order to gain the numbers. It is important to note, however, that Warren does not say a church must be huge in order for it to be vital or healthy; rather, he believes that a church's health can be equated to its dynamic growth.

So what are some of the changes that must take place for a local assembly to adopt the growth strategy of the Saddleback model? From our understanding of the plan which was clearly spelled out at the seminar, the following must occur in order to transform a traditionally-styled church of any size into one that can boast dramatic growth:

- A contemporary-styled "Seeker Service" aimed at drawing in the unsaved and the unchurched from the community must replace the traditional Sunday worship service. To do this successfully, the church service must be non-threatening, familiar and comfortable to the "seeker" (the unsaved visitor).

- The dress must be casual. The typical "Saddleback Sam" (a researched composite of the unchurched yuppie commonly found in Saddleback Church's surrounding community) dresses up for work all week, and he wants to "dress down" on the weekends. (As we shall see throughout this article, Saddleback Sam's likes and dislikes are what determine the style of the church service.) Attendees and church staff alike shun any ties, suits and dresses. Warren, dressed in a casual shirt, khakis and loafers told his seminar audience, "Get comfortable. This is as dressed up as I get in this church. My idea of winter is I put on socks, and obviously I don't think it's winter yet."
- The music must be contemporary. Not only must the lyrics of the music be more recent, but the style of music should be that which the unsaved hears on a daily basis. The entertainment composite of the Saddleback sound system, band, singers and presentation would rival that of any secular rock concert. Warren stated that one of the first things a church should do is "replace the organ with a band." But he went on to say that if a band was not feasible, then at least a church could purchase a keyboard that will incorporate midi disks in order to give the sound of a band. Furthermore, the purpose of the church choir should be "backing up the soloist. That's the 90's way to use a choir rather than just having them sing."
- The message must be only positive. We consider this to be the most flagrant flaw. Yes, the saved and unsaved alike can feel better about themselves after a message that often mixes psychology and an uplifting Scripture text. Such topics as dealing with guilt, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, mood enhancement or motivation for success will encourage the worldly, weary individual. But what is God's command to the faithful undershepherd of the flock? Far, far different.
- The ministries of the church must be geared to meeting the needs and special interests of the thousands who attend. Support groups for depression, eating disorders, infertility, family and friends of homosexuals, post abortion, and separated men and women were abundant. Many ministries were intended to bring together ones with similar business or professional interests, common recreational interests and so on. We could not find one single ministry listed in Saddleback Community Church's bulletin that involved the taking the Gospel message out to the lost in the community. In fact, Warren scoffed at the idea of passing out tracts or going door-to-door since "Saddleback Sam" is offended by such old-fashion, out-moded forms of evangelism.
- Doctrinal instruction is not given to the church as a whole on the Lord's Day. Despite the fact that the early church clearly sets forth the example that doctrine is to be taught on Sunday to all the church body, at Saddleback, doctrine is only taught to sub-groups of the congregation apart from the regular church services. Warren emphasized Saddleback's strategy of moving new members "around the bases" by having interested Christians take special classes to prepare them for service. Although Bible study groups also meet together, our question is this: Why is not the pulpit used to proclaim the "whole counsel of God" to the whole congregation assembled before it on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:20-31)? Why make serious, systematic Bible instruction an option, heard only by the relatively few in the crowd who desire to "round the next base"? The whole counsel of God is to be proclaimed, to all seated before the pulpit, all the time!

A spirit of compromise must prevail in the church that is to experience dynamic growth. The embrace of contemporary culture and style will most assuredly set the desired mood that totally opposes the Biblical mandate to earnestly contend for the faith and separate from error. What works, what is least offensive and what is positive and uplifting is what should define the ministry, according to Warren. The church leaders who are interested in dynamic growth must embrace the attitude that says, "Don't

try to tell me the Bible requires holiness and a style for worship and ministry that is different from that of the world." This "grace-in-your-face" attitude is so prevalent today because of church elders who are not willing, or not aware of how, to instruct ones to behave in the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15).

Rick Warren began the seminar by revealing the vast influence his message has had throughout the world. He told the pastors and church leaders who were attending the seminar, "You're joining a group today of over 45,000 pastors and church leaders that have gone through this conference in the last few years from about 42 different countries, from about 63 different denominations. We have a number of different countries that flew in today just for this one day conference, from Europe, from Asia, from South America." To accent the ecumenical mood of the seminar, Warren later suggested, "It really doesn't matter your denomination, folks. We're all on the same team if you love Jesus."

Warren's book *The Purpose Driven Church* and the related publications of Saddleback's literature ministry have influenced tens of thousands more who have never attended any of his seminars. As Warren indicated in a closing prayer, the impact of the Saddleback experience is extensive, to say the least: "Thank you that there is a movement, a stealth movement, that's flying beneath the radar, that's changing literally hundreds, even thousands of churches around the world." It is necessary for the faithful believer today to be wary of any "stealth" (camouflaged, secretive) program intended to fly "beneath the radar" in order to avoid detection. For many years now the church growth movement has certainly flown into congregations undetected by thousands of churches worldwide. The onslaught must be detected, the warning must be sounded now!

This report will identify and analyze the programs suggested by the Saddleback Community Church model and will ascertain whether or not this model is consistent with what the Bible says concerning the nature, purpose and strategy of the church. Although Saddleback Community Church is one of the largest churches in America (comparable to Bill Hybels' Willow Creek Community Church), the believer must not take a pragmatic approach to church growth. While the contemporary strategies of worship and ministry employed by both Warren and Hybels seem to be successful (according to the world's standards) and do indeed attract thousands of saved and unsaved alike, results do not determine what is acceptable to the Lord -- only God's Word reveals if their methods please Him.

One of the primary problems with the Saddleback approach is that all traditional, conservative forms of music, worship and decorum in the church are abolished and subsequently replaced with new methods and styles designed after the world. The programs of this new "superchurch" are aimed at making the unsaved, or the "seeker," feel comfortable and entertained and at meeting his temporal needs. Some Christians feel that any method of worship and evangelism is appropriate as long as the lost are being reached for Christ. Thus, they have accepted a pragmatic view of worship and evangelism -- the end justifies the means; if it works, it must be right. But believers and pastors alike must ask, "Is the proper way in which God's people approach unto their Lord in corporate worship relative?"

The goal of the superchurch is to draw a crowd so that the crowds will, eventually, be saved and worked into the church membership. Furthermore, the core ministry of the church allows for the abandonment of everything "traditional" that would in any way appear to be offensive to the neighborhood "seeker." Are godly pastors and believers to fashion their style of service after the comforts of the unsaved "seeker," or could it be that Romans 12:2 is at least somewhat applicable to the church today? God's Word clearly says, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Rick Warren's Saddleback church growth model seems to totally contradict this portion of Scripture.

This report will also make reference to the Saddleback model, as presented in the workshop, and discern whether or not God does indeed have something to say concerning the way in which believers

should worship and minister. From our admittedly fundamentalist perspective, we believe that the Bible does have something to say about the style, as well as the content, of the church service. The Scriptures speak very clearly about the way in which God's people are to approach unto their God, both by way of principle and type from the Old Testament and also apostolic directive in the New Testament.

Before making our observations regarding the sessions we attended, it is needful to point out that Rick Warren has been trained as a Southern Baptist and obviously knows the Bible extremely well. He is a personable individual who is a skilled communicator of his ideas. Warren mentioned that when he developed these concepts as a young man in seminary, no one paid attention to him. However, now that the strategy obviously works, he has an extensive and eager audience. One cannot help but enjoy his presentation, even though the aftertaste is far less pleasant when more careful consideration is given to what was actually said or implied. Many of his suggestions were indeed helpful, but the main thrust of his church growth model is certainly questionable in light of God's Word.

Warren encouraged his seminar attendees to view Saddleback Church as a model for their respective ministries and to use as much or as little of his strategy as they deemed worthwhile. He also said, however, that unless the main aspects of the program were incorporated (the contemporary style and positive-only content of the message, music and program) then the resultant growth would be something far less than dynamic.

Warren's plans for motivating the people, charting an organizational structure for ministry and developing a marketing strategy for building a superchurch are much like what one would hear in a secular management training seminar. In fact, during an intermission this was even mentioned in a conversation with corporate businessmen who were also in attendance. The same techniques that are used to build the base of support for a business can also be used to build a ministry's clientele. What is the key? One must provide a product that will meet the real or perceived needs of the consuming public. For Saddleback Community Church, that meant they had to determine via a survey the needs of the Saddleback community at large and then provide programs at the church to meet those needs. As a result of the survey, a composite "Saddleback Sam," or unsaved church seeker, was defined, and the style and programs of the church were then redefined to meet his needs. Hence, the ministries (support and special interest groups, recreational fellowships, etc.) and the style and content of the "Seeker Service" were aimed at making the typical "Saddleback Sam" feel comfortable, helped and encouraged.

Obviously, some are skeptical of Rick Warren's novel approach to church growth, and Warren is certainly aware of such individuals. He employed effective techniques to disarm his critics by first shooting down a "straw man" representing an exaggerated example of the critic's position or by using humorous one-liners to side-step the criticism before his own proposition was advanced. For example, he advanced the replacement of traditional hymns and musical accompaniment with contemporary Christian rock songs and backup bands that accentuated the driving beat enjoyed by the unsaved with the following reasons:

First, Warren made it clear that loud, raucous music with a driving beat is the kind of music to which Saddleback residents listened, inside and outside of the church:

Now, at Saddleback Church, we are unapologetically contemporary... I passed out a three-by-five card to everybody in the church, and I said, "You write down the call letters of the radio station you listen to." I wasn't even asking unbelievers. I was asking the people in the church, "What kind of music do you listen to?" When I got it back, I didn't have one person who said, "I listen to organ music." Not one. I didn't have a single person who said, "I listen to huge choirs on the radio." Not one. In fact, it was 96-97% adult contemporary, middle-of-the-road pop. It wasn't heavy metal rock, but it was something with a beat like you hear most commercials have today on television. So, we made a

strategic decision that we are unapologetically a contemporary music church. And right after we made that decision and stopped trying to please everybody, Saddleback exploded with growth. Now, I'll be honest with you, we are loud. We are really, really loud on a weekend service.... I say, "We're not gonna turn it down." Now the reason why is baby boomers want to feel the music, not just hear it. Now, I can give you two dozen really good churches within driving distance that are my friends, we're in small groups together, that don't have it as loud as us. Go there. Why should every church have the same music? ... People can find that God loves variety!

The bottom line of his philosophy is this: What is popular in the community, whatever style of music currently has the ear of "Saddleback Sam," must be the music of the church. Church leaders can try to mix the contemporary with the traditional in the same service, or even in separate services, but Warren said doing so would be "like kissing your sister. You could do it, but who'd want to?" His humorous concluding statement cleverly serves to divert the attention away from the larger issue at hand -- allowing the world to determine the type of music that belongs in the house of God.

Second, Warren equated insisting upon the use of traditional music in the church to the sin of idolatry. He said,

You see folks, to insist that all good music came from Europe 200 years ago is thinly veiled racism, if you want to be truthful about it. It's cultural elitism saying that all the good music was written 200 years ago in Europe.... Now for 2,000 years, the Holy Spirit has used all kinds of music. And to insist that one particular style of music is more sacred than the other, there's a word for that. It's called idolatry. Idolatry.

This statement is an example of one of Warren's straw men, for the use of eighteenth-century hymns is not the issue. The question at hand is whether music intended to appeal to the flesh should be used in the church. Much fine and worshipful music penned in this present century is being used in Bible-believing churches today. Style is the issue here, not the century in which the songs were written. The words or message are not what get the place "rocking" on Saturday evening or Sunday morning; it is the arrangement and the orchestration.

Warren claims the Bible says nothing regarding the style of music, only its content. But if the unsaved and saved alike are attracted to a church by its style of music, then how can such a response (which is obviously based upon a fleshly appeal) possibly communicate a message that will edify the spiritual inner man? Can a response of the flesh produce a truly spiritual effect within? Study Galatians 5:16-26 and see if there is not a contradiction of forces at work here. Reverence in praising God will never appeal to the unregenerate, but it certainly will prepare the believer for worshipping God "in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29) and receiving "with meekness the engrafted word" (Jas. 1:21).

Third, Warren's supposed Biblical justification for using contemporary music is sorely deficient.

Warren told his audience,

The Bible says in Psalm 40:3, "He put a new song in my mouth; many people will see this and worship Him. Then they will trust the Lord." Notice the parallel or the correlation between music, worship, and evangelism. It says, "Then they will trust the Lord." Now there's a word that I want you to circle in that sentence; it's the word N-E-W. The same old tired songs are not gonna reach anybody...but a new song says, "God is doing something new in our midst."

Dear reader, to what is the psalmist referring when he uses the term new? First of all, remember that Warren said the Bible has absolutely nothing to say about the style of music or worship, so according to his own logic, this verse cannot possibly refer to a contemporary, "new" melody or current lyrics. No, David is talking about the new song that comes forth from one of God's redeemed saints. The Holy Spirit touches the heart of the believer to respond by song in a way the unsaved can never experience, much less desire; this spiritual song is not something the unbeliever can "get into." If the Lord is to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24), then only those who have been washed in the Blood can

truly sing this "new" song. Warren intimates that the unsaved are turned off by the "golden oldies," the "blasts from the past," as he refers to the old hymns. When a believer stops to think about it, the unbeliever's dislike for hymns is understandable. The songs of worship and praise for the Lord obviously only appeal to the spirit of the regenerated man (Rom. 8:16) because the focus is upon the Lord, not man's flesh. If believers cannot see an unreconcilable dichotomy between fleshly and spiritual music, then further study on the holiness of God is advised.

What does Warren say regarding those in the church who oppose the switch from conservative to contemporary in order to bring in the crowds? He stated in no uncertain terms that the old stalwarts would have to go:

Be willing to let people leave the church. And I told you earlier the fact that people are gonna leave the church no matter what you do. But when you define the vision, you're choosing who leaves. You say, "But Rick, yes, they're the pillars of the church." Now, you know what pillars are. Pillars are people who hold things up ... And in your church, you may have to have some blessed subtractions before you have any real additions.

How terribly sad! We have heard from many dear, godly, older saints (and some discerning younger believers as well!) who are heartsick about what happened to their churches after the leaders attended Saddleback seminars. Invariably, these now-dispensable saints have a spiritual maturity and an awareness of Bible truth that is obvious. Yet, instead of their church recognizing the place and blessedness of such believers in the local body of Christ (see Titus 2:1-15), they are brushed off to the side, told to come only to the "more traditional" mid-week service or frankly told to move on and find another church. Because Warren is located in the Southern California area, he mentioned that he often refers others (either visitors or dissenters) to such churches as Robert Schuller's Crystal Cathedral or Jack Hayford's Church on the Way.

No doubt Warren has been criticized by denominational leaders who recoil at his strong suggestion that denominational "labels" should be abolished (thus, Saddleback Community Church, the People's Church, Willow Creek Community Church, etc.). This is common to ecumenical endeavors which minimize doctrinal differences. Warren feels that terms like Baptist, Bible, Presbyterian, etc. might unduly offend some or unnecessarily narrow the group of those who would visit:

The unchurched hang-ups determine our strategy.... We found a hang-up about denominational labels. I went out. I went door to door and said, "What do you think of when I say 'Southern Baptist'?" They said, "You don't want to know." ... So, we chose a neutral name. Why? Well, it wasn't a theological decision, a compromise. It was an evangelistic strategy decision because we wanted to reach out.

Interestingly, Warren worked into his presentation the fact that the Southern Baptist traditionalists evidently smile on his approach. Notice what he said concerning his meeting with several Southern Baptist notables:

Once a year the pastors of the twenty-five largest Southern Baptist churches get together, and we hole up in a hotel for two or three days and just talk about our churches. All these churches are running at least 2,000 in attendance. And it's people like Adrian Rodgers and Charles Stanley and Ed Young and just all kinds of guys you may have heard or may have never heard of.... we were sitting in a room together with all these people, and they said, "Rick, take a couple hours and just tell us about Saddleback. What's going on?" Sitting catty-corner to me -- I was a little nervous about this -- sitting catty-corner to me was Dr. W. A. Criswell.... for two hours I'm just telling what's going on at Saddleback. And here's W. A. Criswell in his seventies taking notes as fast as he could, writing things down, writing things down. And I walked out of there, and I started crying. I was so humbled by that experience, and I realized why he was a great man. He'd never stopped learning.

This account was not given to merely express Warren's humility; it was to authenticate his church growth strategy by revealing that the respected experts, the "denominational giants," accepted his methods. Furthermore, this was a subtle hint to his audience that if even W. A. Criswell felt he needed to learn from Warren on how to minister and grow a superchurch, then certainly each of the 3,500 church leaders attending the seminar also needed to take careful notes. Rick Warren made it expressly known that if one wants growth, dynamic growth, then he must do it this "Saddleback" way, but if that person decides to stay in the conservative, traditional mode, his ministry and church will wither on the vine.

The church growth/church marketing strategy has had a great impact upon the churches of this land and around the world, and it will be even much more pervasive in the days ahead. What church does not want to grow -- dramatically and dynamically!/? In this article, we are not trying to question the motives of those who design and those who adopt dynamic church growth methods. It is the methods themselves that we condemn. Warren candidly said, the unchurched culture determines our style. We're laid back Southern California. We're just a few miles from the beach, so we have a laid back Southern California style....Regardless of the style you choose, you're going to be criticized. Okay? So, the key question is, "Who are you trying to impress?" The unchurched populations determine our goals.

Are we to seek to impress the world? Is the world to determine the strategy of the church? Christ warned that the world would hate the church, not admire it (Jn. 15:18). The Word, not the world, is to determine the strategy of the church.

Even though Warren would probably protest this observation, the fact remains the same -- the message, not just the methods, dramatically changes when one employs the purpose-driven church strategy. The Bible commands that the "whole counsel of God" be preached in the church; that necessarily includes preaching the negative as well as the positive and having a pulpit ministry that obeys God's call to equip the saints to go out into the world and to be "ambassadors for Christ" in reaching the lost in the community. A "feel-good message" appealing to saint and seeker alike does not fulfill God's command to "contend for the faith," "reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine" and "warn of the wolves in sheep's clothing." Where in the Bible does it say the church's ministry is to meeting the psychological, emotional and interpersonal relationship needs of the unsaved? Such a philosophy cannot be found in God's Word.

The traditional church service has tried to equip the saint for service and witness and to foster a spirit of reverence in the worship and adoration of the Lord. We believe there is Biblical justification for this design, or "style," of worship. Warren says that if one wants dynamic growth, he must choose between the traditional or the inventive, contemporary, user-friendly church like that of Saddleback Community. Our concern is that thousands are indeed opting for the latter, and we believe the Bible gives us some reasons why that choice is wrong.

A quote from John Moffat's book *All Truth God's Truth?* seems to be particularly fitting for the Saddleback strategy of designing the church's service after the contemporary worldly context:

I can imagine Nadab and Abihu talking before the early worship service in the wilderness. One says to the other, "All fire is God's fire. God made all fire; therefore it is all of Him." Or while Moses was up on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel could have said to Aaron, "All worship of god is God's worship." These analogies have the same deceptive sound of being logical at first glance, but they are full of the same ambiguity and deceit as the expression "all truth is God's truth."

Rick Warren made the statement, "I don't think God cares two bits about your style of worship as long as it's in spirit and in truth." Is he correct? The terms spirit and truth must first be defined in a Biblical context. When worshipping the Lord, man's spirit is to be moved only by the Holy Spirit of God (not his _esh); furthermore, worship is to be in truth which means it can only be defined according to what

God's Holy Word says (not what man says). The Bible says that worship is to be practiced in holiness and reverence -- these qualities of "style" are not subjective! If the methods of worship were totally relative to the individual, then the demonstration of "spirit" and "truth" in worship would mean absolutely nothing -- there would be no way to distinguish the church from the social institutions of the unregenerate world. No, the Bible says the people of God are to be holy, as He is holy. They are to be a "peculiar people," "a light set upon the hill"; they are noticeably different from the world. Thus, Warren's statement is not correct; God does indeed care about one's "style" in worship and methodology. Our worship is to be patterned after the likeness of Christ Himself and in accordance with the principles set forth in the eternal, unalterable Word of Truth.

First Chronicles 16:29 says, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." Is "holiness" subjective to the individual? Absolutely not -- only God is holy; therefore, the characteristics of holiness are found in the Lord, not man. Many examples and direct statements in God's Word guide the believer in his worship and in his witness away from the course of this present evil age. The qualifications of holiness are invariably different from the world; thus, holy worship includes both reverence and separation from a worldly style.

Notice the New Testament counterpart for the Lord's people in the church: 1 Timothy 6:11-14 says, But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. I give thee charge in the sight of God... That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

First Peter 1:13-19 and Peter 2:5, 9 furthermore provide believers in the Church Age with commands that must be considered when defining purpose:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: [NOT stylizing our current walk after the former unsaved, worldly walk] But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.... Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Who comprises the local church? The church is to meet together on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week; we find that the local New Testament church consisted of believers who met together for worship, fellowship, instruction and edification. First Corinthians 3:16-17 tells us that the church is the temple of God. When believers gather together as a local church, they must view themselves as the dwelling place of God and must realize that it is a place where man and God meet together for fellowship. The local body of believers, the church, is the temple of the all-holy God.

Ephesians 4:11-12 clearly shows that God gave individual leaders of the local church (pastors and teachers) special gifts for a particular purpose -- "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." The local church is not an organization that is ordained by God to conform to the world in order to reach the lost. No, the purpose of the local church is to worship God, to grow in His grace and knowledge and to train the individual believers in the Word so that they might better reach the lost for Christ and be a testimony to the world. They are to be

different from the world -- patterned after Christ -- not imitating or conforming to the world.

One of the most revealing slogans used by Warren to show what must occur in any church in order for growth to result is this: "Never confuse the method with the message. The message must never change, but the methods must change!" Is it true that Saddleback Community Church has not changed its proclamation to the thousands assembled beneath its pulpit? What about Willowcreek Community Church and other contemporary, dynamic-growth ministries? No, these mega-churches have indeed changed the message -- they have departed significantly from the Biblical mandate regarding the declaration of the whole counsel of God to be proclaimed by the elders/pastors of the faithful New Testament church. The message has clearly changed, and Warren's own words prove it:

Read Scripture from a newer translation. And as you read that Scripture, realize that you're trying to pick out Scriptures that appeal especially to baby boomers. And try to find Scriptures that specifically relate to the benefits that Christ can bring into a person's life. They've never heard the Scripture before, so try to pick positive Scriptures that talk about the benefits of Christ... you want to pick out Scriptures that are very positive.

Choosing only "positive texts" to preach on the Lord's Day (or on Saturday evenings for those churches that desire to make the services more "convenient") and using only "positive texts" to define the purposes of the church (of the 41 "verses that relate to the purposes of the church" listed in the seminar workbook, none were included which dealt with insistence upon warning, doctrine, etc.; none were from Acts 20, Romans 16, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter, Jude or Revelation) result in a glaring deficiency in one's message. Vitally important texts dealing specifically with the church's doctrine, message and ministry must be ignored in order to maintain positive-only preaching. Indeed, the message does change!

Notice the following quote from a revealing essay entitled "Does Theology Still Matter?" by Gary L. W. Johnson in the book *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*:

Although most of today's professing evangelicals would acknowledge that theology, in some sense of the word, does matter, a recent survey in *Christianity Today* revealed that this is more lip service than anything else. According to this survey...theology, in any sense of the word, is really not all that important to the very people to whom it should matter most: those in the pew and in the pulpit. Both groups listed theological knowledge as last in terms of pastoral priorities... We are sadly experiencing, on a rather large scale, a subjectivism that betrays its weakened hold on the objective truth and reality of Christianity by its neglect or even renunciation of its distinctive objective character.... Men... really wish to have a creedless Christianity. "Creeds," they shout, "are divisive things; away with them!"... Where does this leave us? An undogmatic Christianity is no Christianity at all. (Moody Press, 1996, pp. 58, 66, 67)

What does the Bible say about the purpose of the church worship service and what the faithful pastor must preach to the "crowd" (as Warren describes it) that assembles each Sunday? No doubt Saddleback Church leaders would be quick to point out that the four Christian education classes available to the congregation do deal with doctrine. However, the Bible is clear that doctrine is to be faithfully proclaimed on the Lord's Day through the pulpit ministry of the pastors/elders. Providing optional training, apart from the instruction given from the pulpit, cannot side-step what God intends the public church service to be.

The Saddleback seminar said that only positive Bible texts should be used from the pulpit, but God's Word says something quite different. The apostle Paul had very straightforward directives for the elders of the Ephesian church regarding their ministry, and the same is essential today. Acts 20:20-31 says, ... I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance

toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.... For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Was the apostle's instruction negative? Yes, but certainly also necessary! Many of the duties that the Lord requires of faithful pastors and teachers are found in texts that were "overlooked" by the Saddleback workbook. Whatever text came across as negative was obviously passed over. Another such text is Titus 1:3-11:

[God] hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.... For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: ... [Hold] fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers [those who contradict or speak against the truth of God]. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped....

Second Timothy 3:16-4:5 gives further instruction regarding the purpose for the church; this text was also ignored by Saddleback's dynamic growth strategy:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers [those who will not practice the above], having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

Are you identified with a church that is led by faithful undershepherds who are committed to obeying these commands? Are they willing to contend for the faith and warn their people - from the pulpit? Or is it a "positive-only" message? We must stand only with those willing to obey these essentials for faithful ministry.

The Saddleback strategy is, again, to design the weekend "Seeker Service," the programs and the support ministries of the church in order to attract the unsaved in the community. According to the strategy, the "seeker" must want to come to church; therefore, the services must be designed in such a way that he will be comfortable, entertained and find the answers to his problems as he perceives them. Warren teaches that the ministry of the church must be stylized after those things to which the unsaved are accustomed -- whether that style includes the language used, the music performed, the casual attire worn or even the message proclaimed from the pulpit. The character, the style and the contemporary interests of the unregenerate community are what determine the makeup, the appearance and the content of the weekend services.

The following comments by Rick Warren reveal Saddleback's "Biblical" justification for making the church "user friendly" to the unsaved:

Now Paul's evangelism strategy was this: 1 Corinthians 9 -- "To the Jew I became like a Jew to win the

Jews. In the same way with the Gentiles, I became like a Gentile in order to win the Gentiles. I have become all things to all men that I may save some of them by any means possible." He's saying, "Adapt to the situation God puts you in." Today, he'd say, "When in Southern California, become like a Southern Californian to reach Southern Californians."

Let us take a closer look at this portion of Scripture found in 1 Corinthians 9. First, the apostle is not defining in this text the purpose and character of the worship service of the local church. Instead, this discourse is the personal testimony of Paul, the evangelistically-minded missionary, as he took the message of Christ to the lost in their respective communities, cultures and circumstances. Second, the "assembling together of the saints" on the first day of the week, Sunday, was for the purpose of being built up in the faith, of giving attendance to the "reading [of the Scriptures], to exhortation [the charge to continue in God's truth], to doctrine [the teaching of 'all the counsel of God']" -- 1 Timothy 4:13.

The overwhelming volume of instruction in the epistles was given to the elders of the churches and to ones such as Timothy and Titus who were to "set in order the things which are wanting" (Titus 1:5). This apostolic instruction had to do with what the Christian was to believe and how he was to "behave [himself] in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). For Warren to suggest that the church's purpose is to provide common ground for the "seeker" and present him only positive Biblical texts that speak to his emotional, psychological and inter-personal "needs" is absolutely ludicrous! The pastor is to preach the Word - all of It - or It ceases to be "the pillar and ground of the truth"!

The purpose of 1 Corinthians 9 is not to define the church's worship service, but rather it details the resolute purpose and godly motivation of the apostle Paul to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all, Jew and Gentile, bond or free, regardless of the ethnic, cultural or social standing the lost might have. Paul had no target group! All needed to be saved, and he dedicated himself to going out to meet the lost in their situation, but never at the expense of being anything less than what God called him to be, and that was to be "holy, even as I [God] am holy." Second Corinthians 5:14-21 confirms Paul's selfless, evangelistic purpose:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: [Christ died for all; all need to be saved; we seek to win all] ... Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Paul was willing to be a servant to all so that he might present Christ to all, regardless of their station in life (vv. 19, 20). He went out; he did not stylize a "seeker service" to lure unbelievers in. The walk of the believer is to be distinctly different from that of the world; it is not to mirror the walk of the world (Eph. 2:1-3).

No, Paul did not become like the unsaved with respect to their lifestyle nor address their desires to meet their perceived "needs" of the flesh! He was still ministering "under the law to Christ" (v. 21) and kept his body under the control of the Holy Spirit of God (vv. 24-27). The difference was that he was willing to be "a servant," to do what he could to gain a hearing. No one was beneath any social or educational constraints. No one was off limits due to their ethnic or cultural differences. To the philosophers on Mars hill, Paul used their idolatry and superstitions as a springboard to tell them of the "unknown God" that they ignorantly worshipped; he preached to them Christ crucified and risen again (Acts 17:22-34). The Gospel testimony in the pagan city of Ephesus did not result in the church being patterned after the predominate culture of the community -- the temple of Diana. No, the proclamation of Christ ruined the business of the ungodly, and changed lives resulted in a changed culture, not a

changed church (Acts 19:21 ff). Another example of this willingness to subjugate personal liberty to win the lost is found in the advice given by the apostles at Jerusalem in Acts 15. Even the Gentile converts living among unsaved Jews were to be "under the law" in the sense that they would not eat that which would be offensive to the Jews they were trying to reach with the Gospel (Acts 15:25-29). "Style" of ministry is not the issue here.

The church is to evangelize, but in such a way that the Biblical purpose for the church is not compromised. Saddleback's strategy is deficient and dangerous.