

“Good Fruit v. Good Vibes”

The song “Hook” by Blues Traveler on repeat recently. It was written to mock the emptiness of popular songs. Such songs are lyrically meaningless, but the music is meant to appeal to the senses, catching the ear of the listener. “I don’t know what that person says, but it sounds good.” So, the singer of Blues Traveler, John Popper, croons, “It doesn’t matter what I say/So long as I sing with inflection/That makes you feel that I’ll convey/some inner truth of vast reflection/But I’ve said nothing so far/And I can keep it up for as long as it takes.”

I’ve thought about that song because of the recent political discourse that a “good vibes” campaign is the key to victory. It saddens me that what is now more important in our public discourse is how something makes you feel.

A church can also take the same playbook and aim for those “good vibes”. This was a warning from Neil Postman to the church in his 1985 book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. As I understand it, Postman argues that American culture is threatened by a self-indulgent addiction to pleasure. He applies this to pastors who preach sermons that “tickle ears” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Similarly, churches can aim to make people feel good; but the content of what is taught or said is meaningless.

To be sure, feelings matter, for we are created with them. But the problem is when feelings lead the way. Feelings need to be directed toward what is true. Scripture demonstrates the need to challenge, correct, and train our feelings by the Word of God (Psalm 77).

G.K. Chesterton once said, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.” Similarly, Postman wrote, “I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.”

The church must run on the declaration of “good news”: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified in his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God” (Rom. 5:9). The content and truth of the gospel message is primary, no matter if it brings “good vibes”. In fact, even though the world needs the good news, it is demanding, and it requires seriousness. Churches should maintain the good news campaign. And we don’t call what flows from it “good vibes” but “good fruit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

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