

Knowing Our Audience

by Fred Peatross

In the past decade Christian assemblies have found themselves competing head-to-head with western culture's entertainment romance. There was a time when the only event in town was what took place at the community church. You wore your best Sunday clothes; shook a few hands in the foyer, grabbed a pew seat and became part of a captive, passive audience. Announcements were made, a few songs were sung (about 19th century light houses and Nights of Ebon Pinions) and the preacher proclaimed his slant on the gospel truth. The only way out of his sermon was to sit and wait. Without controversy, or question, every listener accepted the preacher's message; for it was the only one being told in the camp.

Oh, how times have changed! Today the interactive media (Internet) is, at its core, an invitation to talk back. It has encouraged and fostered the voice and opinion of every person, however much their voice may contradict the status quo. This interactive forum has given postmodern culture the freedom and right to reflect upon the stories they've been told and then create their own version of the story, which becomes their sacred truth. The very nature of the on line community has loosened up any and all narratives. Today everyone has been given the right to have his or her own "small story" to the exclusion of any one's "big story."

Try going on line and preaching in an AOL chat room. The people you preach to will not remain silent. The traditional role of the mediator of faith (ministers, pastors, etc.) has been redefined. There are no authorities. Only partners in spiritual learning. The on line community has challenged blind (loyalty) acceptance by offering alternate points of view while promoting pluralism and encouraging feedback. The Bible narrative has been deconstructed, while inviting people from every race and culture to participate in the conversation and tell their own story.

There has been an historical shift in our culture. Are we aware? Are we thoughtful, creative, and care enough to change? Or will we continue transmitting the greatest narrative ever told through out-dated, linear gospel preaching?

We must adjust or lose our audience?

Fred Peatross, author of the newsletter GraceAwakening, is a christian and author attempting to help the grace oriented, Christ-centered churches of Christ redo the world by giving postmodernism's aimless present a useable past and hope-filled future.