

The Rat Race of The Highly Programmed Church

By Scott Brown

No one would contest the proposition that the American church is highly programmed. Unfortunately, much of the programming of the modern church has caused a neglect of certain clearly stated Biblical responsibilities. By programming "in" some types of activities, we have correspondingly programmed "out" others that are Biblical and vital to the building up of the Body of Christ.

A few years ago, I was leading a Sunday School Class. One morning at the beginning of the class, before we started the Bible study, we were informally discussing the data that was recently released indicating that the divorce rates in the conservative evangelical churches in the southern quarter of the US were higher than those in all other denominations in all other parts of the country. The report indicated that the divorce rates were also higher than those who claimed themselves unbelievers. We were saying: 'What happened to the Bible Belt? I raised the question to the people, 'Why do we have these divorce rates in our churches?' What are the drivers of this condition?"

One man submitted that he knew that his atheist neighbor spent much more time with his wife and children than he did. He went on to explain that, in contrast to his atheist neighbor, on top of his job responsibilities, he was involved in church programs, boards and meetings and services that kept his family apart all the time. He said: 'I hardly ever see my family.'

His take was that because the church always separated the family, the families were separating.

"Proverbial Bob" is in Big Trouble

After this discussion, I began to think about what the man in the Sunday school class said about the over busyness of the average church member. So, in our next elders' meeting I broached the subject of 'Proverbial Bob.' I explained the conversation we had in Sunday school, and profiled what could be the average week in the life of the average man in any church in America, and particularly our church (because we knew best what it was really like). "Proverbial Bob," is a committed Christian. He has been saved by the Grace of Jesus Christ and he loves His church. He has a job in sales that takes him out of town or to a business dinner once or twice per week. He has two children on sports teams. He is a leader in the men's ministry and a member of another small group that meets weekly.

We took a snapshot of a week in the life of "Proverbial Bob" and we saw that Bob is headed for trouble. He will also create some really big trouble for coming generations, because he takes no time to feed his soul or the souls of his wife and children. He hardly ever prays with his wife. He hardly ever studies the Word. He never sets time aside to strategically plan for his family's Bible instruction. He hardly ever worships with his family because when they are at church they are separated by soundproof walls. He hardly ever studies the Bible with his children, because there is simply no way to jam it in, because nearly all of his evenings are captured by business meetings, church group meetings, and sports events.

I cannot understand why "Proverbial Bob" would choose all of these activities over filling his home with the Word of God. It is beyond my comprehension that he would make this trade. It makes me wonder if he is a true believer. If he loved God, he would love the Word. If he loved the Word, he would bring it into his home everyday. It tells me that either he has left his first love, or he just is not aware of his calling as a man to train the next generation in the Word. He runs the risk of entering heaven and his Master saying,

"poorly done, busy disciple, you went to a lot of Bible studies, produced "excellent" events and trained your sons to play soccer but you neglected weightier matters."

Proverbial Bob is in trouble. But so is his church. His church enables and encourages his destructive patterns.