

The Devil's Mission of Amusement

The Church's Task—Entertainment or Evangelization?

By Archibald Brown

(Archibald Brown was a student of Charles Spurgeon. Under Brown's ministry, scores were saved and instructed.)

Different *days* demand their own special testimony. The watchman who would be faithful to his Lord and the city of his God, has need to carefully note the *signs of the times* and emphasize his witness accordingly. Concerning the testimony needed now, there can be little, if any, doubt. An evil is in the professed camp of the Lord, so gross, so brazen in its impudence, that the most shortsighted of spiritual men can hardly fail to notice it. During the past few years it has developed at an abnormal rate, ever for evil. It has worked like leaven until now the whole lump ferments. Look which way you may, its presence makes itself manifest. There is little if anything to choose between Church, Chapel, or Mission Hall. However they may differ in some respects, they bear a striking likeness in the posters which disfigure their notice boards. *Amusement for the people* is the leading article advertised by each. If any of my readers doubt my statement, or think my utterance too sweeping, let them take a tour of inspection and study "the announcements for the week" at the doors of the sanctuaries of the neighborhood; or let them read the religious advertisements in their local papers. I have done this again and again, until the hideous fact has been proved up to the hilt, that "amusement" is ousting "the preaching of the Gospel" as the great attraction. "Concerts," "Entertainments," "Dramatic Performances," are the words honoured with biggest type and most startling colors. The *Concert* is fast becoming as much a recognized part of church life as the *Prayer Meeting*, and is already, in most places, far better attended.

"Providing recreation for the people" will soon be looked upon as a necessary part of Christian work, and as binding upon the Church of God, as though it were a Divine command, unless some strong voice be raised which will make themselves heard. I do not presume to possess such a voice, but I do entertain the hope that I may awaken some louder echoes. Anyway, the burden of the Lord is upon me in this matter, and I leave it with Him to give my testimony ringing tone, or to let it die away in silence. I shall have delivered my soul in either case. Yet the conviction fills my mind that in all parts of the country there are faithful men and women who see the danger and deplore it and will endorse my witness and my warning.

It is only during the past few years that "amusement" has become a recognized weapon of our warfare, and developed into a *mission*. There has been a steady "down grade" in this respect. From "speaking out," as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony; then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she has tolerated them in her borders, and now she has adopted them and provided a home for them—under the plea of "reaching the masses and getting the ear of the people." The devil has seldom done a cleverer thing—than hinting to the Church that part of her

mission is to provide entertainment for the people with a view to winning them into her ranks. The evil nature which lies in every heart, has risen to catch the bait. Here, now, is an opportunity of gratifying the flesh—and yet retaining a comfortable conscience. We can now *please ourselves*, in order to do good to others. The rough old cross can be exchanged for a "costume," and the exchange can be made with the benevolent purpose of elevating the people.

All this is terribly sad, and the more so because truly gracious souls are being led away by the specious pretext, that amusements are a form of Christian work. They forget that a seemingly beautiful angel—may be the devil himself, "for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

Church amusements are not supported by Scripture

My first contention is—that providing amusement for the people is nowhere spoken of in Holy Scripture as one of the functions of the church. What her duties are, will come under our notice later on. At present it is the negative side of the question that we are dealing with. Now, surely, if our Lord had intended His church to be the caterer of entertainment, and so counteract the god of this world—He would hardly have left so important a branch of service *unmentioned*. If it is Christian work, why did not Christ at least hint it? "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature," is clear enough. So would it have been, if He had added, "*and provide amusement for those who do not relish the Gospel.*" No such addendum, however, is to be found, nor even an equivalent for such, in any one of our Lord's utterances. This style of work did not seem to occur to His mind. Then again, Christ, as an ascended Lord, gives to His Church specially qualified men for the carrying on of His work, but no mention of any gift for this branch of service occurs in the list. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers—for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ," Where do the "*public entertainers*" come in? The Holy Spirit is silent concerning them, and his *silence is eloquence*.

If "providing recreation" be a part of the Church's work, surely we may look for some promise to encourage her in the toilsome task. Where is it? There is a promise that, "My Word shall not return unto Me void." There is the heart-rejoicing declaration concerning the Gospel, "it is the power of God unto salvation." There is the sweet assurance for the preacher of Christ that, whether he is successful or not as the world judges success—that he is "sweet savor unto God." There is the glorious benediction for those whose testimony, so far from amusing the world, rouses its wrath: "Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad—for great is your reward in heaven! For so persecuted they the prophets who were before you." Were the prophets persecuted because they *amused* the people—or because they refused to? The *Gospel of amusement* has no martyr roll. In vain does one look for a promise from God—for providing recreation for a godless world. That which has no authority from Christ, no provision

made for it by the Spirit, no promise attached to it by God—can only be a lying deceit, when it lays claim to be "a branch of the work of the Lord".

Church amusements are not taught by the Savior

But again, providing amusement for the people—is in direct antagonism to the teaching and life of Christ and all his apostles. What is to be the attitude of the Church towards the world according to our Lord's teaching? Strict *separation* and uncompromising hostility. While no hint ever passed His lips of winning the world by *pleasing* it, or accommodating methods to its taste—His demand for *unworldliness* was constant and emphatic. He sets forth in one short sentence, what He would have His disciples to be: "You are the salt of the earth." Yes, the salt—not the *sugar-candy!* Something the world will be more inclined to *spit* out—than *swallow* with a smile. Something more calculated to bring water to the eye—than laughter to the lip.

Short and sharp is the utterance, "Let the dead bury their dead: but you go and preach the kingdom of God." "If you were of the world—the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." "In the world you shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; for I have overcome the world." "I have given them Your Word, and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "My kingdom is not of this world."

These passages are hard to reconcile with the modern idea of the Church providing *recreation* for those who have no taste for more serious things—in other words, of *pleasing* the world. If they teach anything at all, it is that fidelity to Christ will bring down the world's wrath—and that Christ intended His disciples to share with Him, the world's scorn and rejection. How did Jesus act? What were the methods of the only perfectly "faithful witness" the Father has ever had?

As none will question that He is to be the worker's model, let us gaze upon Him. How significant the introductory account given by Mark, "Now, after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. *Repent!* and believe the Gospel." And again, in the same chapter, I find Him saying, in answer to the announcement of His disciples, that all men were seeking for Him, "Let us go into the next towns that I may *preach* there also, for therefore came I forth." Matthew tells us, "And it came to pass when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence to *teach* and *preach* in their cities." In answer to John's question, "Are You the one who is to come?" He replies, "Go and show John those things which you do hear and see . . . and the poor have the *Gospel* preached to them." There is no item in the catalogue for providing amusement, such as: "And provide the people with innocent recreation."

We are not left in doubt as to the matter of His preaching, for "when many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the

door, He *preached* the Word unto them." There was no *change of method* adopted by the Lord during His course of ministry. His first word of command to His evangelists was, "As you go, *preach!*" His last command was, "*Preach* the Gospel to every creature." None of the gospels suggests that at any time during His ministry, He turned aside from *preaching—to entertain*, and so attract the people. He was in solemn earnestness, and his ministry was as earnest as Himself. Had He been less uncompromising, and introduced more of the "bright and pleasant" element into His ministry, He would have been more popular.

Yet, when many of His disciples turned away, because of the searching nature of His preaching, I do not find there was any attempt to increase a diminished congregation, by resorting to something more pleasant to the flesh. I do not hear Him saying, "We must keep up the gatherings at any cost! So run after those people, Peter, and tell them we will have a different style of service tomorrow! Something very short and attractive, with little, if any, preaching. Today was a service for God, but tomorrow we will have a pleasant evening for the people. Tell them they will be sure to enjoy it, and have a pleasant time. Be quick, Peter! We must get the people somehow; if not by *Gospel*, then by entertainment!" No, this was not how He argued. Gazing in sorrow on those who would not hear the Word, He simply turns to the twelve, and asks, "Will you go away also?"

Jesus *pitied* sinners, *pleaded* with them, *sighed* over them, *warned* them, and *wept* over them; but He never sought to *amuse* them! When the evening shadows of His consecrated life were deepening into the night of death, He reviewed His holy ministry, and found comfort and sweet solace in the thought, "I have given them Your Word." As with the Master, so with His apostles- their teaching is the echo of His. In vain will the epistles be searched to discover any trace of a gospel of amusement. The same call for separation from the world rings in everyone, "But not conformed to this world, but be you transformed," is the word of command in the Romans. "Come out from among them. and be you separate and touch not the unclean thing." It is the trumpet call in the Corinthians. In other words it is come out - keep out - keep clean out - for "what communion has light with darkness, and what concord has Christ with Belial?"

"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." Here is the true relationship between the Church and the world according to the Epistle to the Galatians. "Do not be partakers with them. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather *reprove* them," is the attitude enjoined in Ephesians. "That you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world. Hold firmly the message of life," is the word in Philippians. "Dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world," says the Epistle to the Colossians, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" is the demand in Thessalonians.

"If anyone *purifies* himself from these things, he will be a special instrument, *set apart*, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work," is the word to Timothy. "Let us then go to Him outside the camp, bearing His disgrace," is the heroic summons of the

Hebrews. James, with holy severity, declares that "Friendship with the world is enmity with God; whoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Peter writes: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance but, as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written—Be holy, because I am holy." John writes a whole epistle, the gist of which is, "Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For everything that belongs to the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one's lifestyle—is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world with its lust is passing away, but the one who does God's will remains forever."

Here are the teachings of the apostles concerning the relationship of the *Church* and the *world*. And yet, in the face of them, what do we see and hear? A friendly *compromise* between the two—and an insane effort to please and amuse the world. God help us, and dispel the strong delusion. How did the apostles carry on their mission work? Was it in harmony with their teaching? Let the Acts of the Apostles give the answer.

Anything approaching the worldly amusements of today, is conspicuous by its absence. The early evangelists had boundless confidence in the *power of the Gospel*, and employed no other weapon. Pentecost followed plain preaching. When Peter and John had been locked up for the night for *preaching*—the early Church had a *prayer meeting*. Directly they returned, and the petition offered for the two was, "And now, Lord, grant unto Your servants, that with all boldness they may speak *Your word*." They had no thought of praying, "Grant unto Your servants more wisdom, that by a wise and discriminating use of innocent recreation, they may avoid the offence of the cross, and sweetly show the unsaved, how happy and merry a lot we are."

The charge brought against the apostles was, "You have filled Jerusalem with your *doctrine*." Not much chance of this charge being brought against *modern* methods! The description of their work is, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to *teach* and *preach* Jesus Christ." Then, if they "ceased not" from this, they had no time for *arranging for entertainments*! They gave themselves continually to the ministry of the Word. Scattered by persecution, the early disciples "Went everywhere, *preaching the Word*."

When Philip went to Samaria, and was the means of bringing "great joy to that city," the only recorded method is, "He *preached Christ* unto them." When the apostles went to visit the scene of his labors, it is stated, "And they, when they had testified and *preached the Word of the Lord*, returned to Jerusalem, and *preached the Gospel* in many villages of the Samaritans." When they had finished their preaching, it is evident they did not think it was their mission to stay and organize some "pleasant evenings of entertainment" for those people who did not believe.

The congregations in those days did not expect anything but the Word of the Lord, for Cornelius says to Peter, "We are all here in the presence of God—to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us." The message given was, "Words whereby you

and all your house shall be saved." Cause and effect are closely linked in the statement, "Some of them went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, *preaching the good news about the Lord Jesus*. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord." Here you have their *method*—they preached. Their *matter*—the good news about the Lord Jesus. Their *power*—the hand of the Lord was with them. Their *success*—a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

What more does the Church of God require today? When Paul and Barnabas worked together, the record is, "The Lord gave testimony unto the Word of His grace," When Paul, in a vision, hears a man of Macedonia saying, "Come over and *help* us," he assuredly understands that the Lord had called him to *preach* the Gospel unto them. Why so? How did he know, but that the help needed was the brightening of their lives by a little amusement, or the refining of their manners by a collection of paintings? He never thought of such things! "Come and *help* us!" meant to him, "*Preach* the Gospel." "As his *custom* was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead." That was the "custom" of evangelistic work in those days, and it seems to have been wonderfully powerful; for the verdict of the people is, "These who have turned the world upside down—have come here also!" Just now, the *world is turning the Church upside down*; that is the only difference.

When God told Paul that He had many people in Corinth, I read, "And he continued there a year and six months, *teaching the Word of God* among them." Evidently then, he judged that the only way to save them, was by the Word. A year and a half—and only *one method* adopted. Wonderful! Our modern preachers would have had a dozen methods in that time! But then Paul never reckoned that *providing something pleasant for the ungodly*, was part of his ministry; for, on his way to Jerusalem and martyrdom, he says, "But I count my life of no value to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus—to *testify to the gospel of God's grace*." This was all the ministry he knew.

The last description we have of the methods of this *prince of evangelists*, is consistent with all that has gone before, "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ." What a contrast to all the rot and nonsense now being perpetrated in the holy name of Christ! May the Lord clear the Church of all the rubbish that the devil has imposed upon her, and bring us back again to apostolic methods!

Church amusements are not spiritually fruitful

Lastly, the *mission of amusement* utterly fails to effect the desired end among the unsaved; but it works havoc among the young converts. Were it a success, it would be none the less wrong. *Success* belongs to God. *Faithfulness* to His instructions is my only responsibility

Nonetheless, *providing amusements for the people* is a contemptible failure. Let us see the *converts* who have been won by amusement. Let the harlots and the drunkards, to whom a dramatic entertainment has been God's first link in the chain of their conversion stand forth. Let the careless and the scoffers who have cause to thank God that the Church has relaxed her spirit of separation and met them half-way in their worldliness, speak and testify. Let the husbands, wives, and children, who have been saved by church amusements, tell out their joy. Let the weary, heavy-laden souls who have found peace through a *pleasing concert*, no longer keep silence. Let the men and women who have found Christ through the reversal of apostolic methods declare the same, and show the greatness of Paul's blunder when he said, "I determined not to know anything among you—but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." There is neither voice nor any to answer. The *failure* is on a par with the *folly*—and as huge as the *sin!* Out of thousands with whom I have personally conversed, the *mission of amusement* has claimed no convert!

Now let the appeal be made to those who, repudiating every other method, have staked everything on the preaching of the Gospel. Let them be challenged to produce results. There is no need. Blazing sacrifices on every hand attest the answer. Ten thousand times ten thousand voices are ready to declare that the plain preaching of the Word was, first and last—the cause of their salvation!

But how about the *other* side of this matter—what are *baneful effects of providing entertainment?* Are they innocent? I will here solemnly as before the Lord, give my personal testimony. Though I have never seen a sinner saved by amusements, I have seen any number of backsliders manufactured by this new departure from the Scripture. Over and over again have they come to me in tears, and asked what they were to do, as they had lost all their peace and fallen into evil. Over and over again has the confession been made, "I began to go wrong by attending worldly amusements that Christians patronized." It is not very long since that a young man, in an agony of soul, said to me, "I never thought of going to the theater—until my minister put it into my heart by preaching that there was no harm in it. I went, and it has led me from bad to worse—and now I am a miserable backslider; and he is responsible for it."

When professors begin to forsake the gatherings for prayer, and grow worldly, I almost always find that *worldly Christianity* is responsible for the first downward step. *The mission of amusements is the devil's half-way house to the world!* It is because of what I have seen that I feel deeply, and would sincerely write strongly. This thing is working rottenness in the Church of God, and blasting her service for the King. In the guise of Christianity, it is accomplishing the devil's own work! Under the pretense of going out to reach the world—it is carrying our sons and daughters into the world, With the plea of "Do not alienate the masses with your strictness," it is seducing the young disciples from the simplicity and the purity of the Gospel. Professing to win the world, it is turning the *garden of the Lord* into a public recreation ground! To fill the church with those who see no beauty in Christ—a *grinning Dragon* is put over the doorway!

It will be no wonder if the Holy Spirit, grieved and insulted, withdraws His presence; for "What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil?"

"Come out!" is the call for today! Sanctify yourselves! Put away the evil from among you. Cast down the world's altars and cut down her groves. Spurn her offered assistance. Decline her help, as your Master did the testimony of devils, for "He did not allow them to speak, because they knew Him." Renounce all the *worldly policy* of the age. Trample upon *Saul's armor*. Grasp the Book of God. Trust the Spirit who wrote its pages. Fight with this weapon—only and always. Cease to *amuse*—and seek to *arouse* with the preaching of the Word. Shun the clap of a delighted audience, and listen for the sobs of a convicted one. Give up trying to "please" men who have only the thickness of the ribs between their souls and hell! Warn, and plead, and entreat—as those who see the fires of eternity about to devour the lost!

Let the Church again *confront* the world—testify *against* it—and meet it only behind the cross! And, like her Lord, she shall overcome, and with Him share the victory!