

# What Makes a Ministry Appealing? (Part 2)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

In the previous installment, I began building upon a statement by my professor of systematic theology at Faith Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Myron J. Houghton.

Basing his thoughts on 2 Cor. 2:15-16, Dr. Houghton stated: “Your ministry is like a fragrance. It will attract some, and it will repel others.”

We are considering here some Biblically legitimate means of making our ministries of the utmost appeal to the greatest number of people. In the first place, we considered the need to know our audiences. We will look at the final two ideas in this, the concluding installment.

## 2. Know Your Subject

I am presenting these ideas in what I see as a logical order. However, this point is really, objectively, the most important and necessary.

An attorney may have tremendous passion. If he does not understand the law, however, he will be of little value to his client. A medical doctor may have incredible empathy. If he is not skilled in the practice of medicine, however, his patient will only continue to suffer.

As ministers, preachers and teachers of the Word of God—dealing with eternal souls—it is not enough for us to rely on emotion or zeal. We need to dispense the precepts of Scripture clearly and, especially, with exact faithfulness to all that He has revealed.

Many volumes could be written on this subject, so it is my intention here just to share a few pointed reminders.

If we want our audiences to be fascinated, we have to impart something they'll find fascinating. Thankfully, the Bible is filled with such material. Our task is to mine it out.

If there ever was a time when the preacher could get by with being less than prepared (or, heaven forbid, less than truthful), that time is gone. Most people in the crowd have a phone in their hands—a click away from fact-checking the sermon.

I accept the fact that preachers and teachers are at different levels of education and understanding. All of us ought to be learning and growing. Some things, however, are simply inexcusable.

In my experience, I have seen messages developed off of a misquoted verse, or a partial reading of a verse, or a misunderstanding of a theological concept. To use a word from James, “My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (3:10).

People are hungry to learn. They want to know the historical and cultural backgrounds which impact our understanding of the Biblical text. They want to be able to trust their teacher—and discover the truth from him.

Almost every time I speak, I also remind the congregation that each one has their own obligations, as well, to “consider what I say” (2 Tim. 2:7), then “(search) the Scriptures” (Acts 17:11) for themselves. Mind you, this is really not an out for the preacher, but actually another level of accountability for him.

### 3. Know Your People

The final suggestion I offer for making our ministries more appealing to more people is to get to know, as much as possible, those whom we teach.

The people in the pews are not props for our presentation, but eternal souls to whom we minister—and we will “give account” (Heb. 13:17) for them.

“I know my *sheep*,” Jesus said, “and am known by my own” (John 10:14). He added, “I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).

In the providence of God, and by His grace, He allowed me to have an experience in pastoral ministry that made an indelible mark upon my heart and mind in this regard. I was greeting people in the foyer one Sunday after the service, and a dear lady came up to me, humbly asking for my assistance.

“Yes, \_\_\_\_\_,” I responded.

The woman was immediately taken aback, and paused.

“You know my name!” she exclaimed out of surprise.

That was a powerful moment for me. It is a lesson that can be hard to practice consistently with all of the people that I meet in my ministry with The Friends of Israel. But, with God’s help, remembering someone’s name makes a deep impression. And I believe it will serve to make our ministries more appealing.

The Apostle Paul concluded the passage on which this series is based by asking this probing question: “And who *is* sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16).

May God give us the strength and wisdom which only He can supply, to the end that our ministries might appeal to the most people, in the worthiest manner.

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