

## JUNK FOOD FOR THE SOUL

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It is well known that a diet of junk food is not healthy for the body or mind. It promotes obesity and disease. It produces listlessness and passivity. There is also, I suggest, a kind of junk food for the soul. It, too, produces a kind of spiritual obesity and disease, listlessness and passivity.

Let me provide an example from the United States. A friend of mine, a pastor of many years, decided to leave the church because of ecclesiological pragmatism that stifled spiritual growth. He saw that "success" in the evangelical church merely required four aspects: a concert-feel worship service, simple practical how-to preaching on popular topics using humor with a non-confrontational challenge, a fun-clean-safe children's ministry, and a similar teen meeting concurrent with the adult service.

I wonder if in Argentina a similar pragmatic attitude operates. One pastoral leader commented: "At one time our church was stronger in teaching and preaching, but the church was almost dead in that period. So, now we prefer to err by just doing than by teaching and not doing."

Recently however, I listened to another sermon by Tim Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan) that clearly is *not* spiritual fast food. His sermons provide a great example of the kind of preaching that we lack in many evangelical churches. His preaching avoids the pitfall of spiritual pragmatism or the false dichotomy between theology and ethics, thinking and doing.

Keller's sermons (and I think the key to his broad impact) is that he *teaches* before he tells us what to do. (And, he makes it interesting. He doesn't bore us.) He understands the biblical dynamic of the *indicative* - *imperative*. The indicative is a statement of theological fact; the imperative is the demand for action or application as a result.

Most preaching today, on the other hand, is junk food for the soul. It stresses application, the practical, and ignores the theology or biblical rationale *for* the application. The result is often just rules, religion, legalism, whereas the real motivation for the Christian life is knowing the Truth that motivates transformation and godly ethics.

The easiest example is 1 John 4:19 -- "We love because he first loved us." Most sermons today, however, simply respond to the demand of the congregation: "Just tell us *how to do it*. Tell us *how* to love. Be *practical*. Don't bore us with teaching that forces us to think or evaluate ourselves or our culture. Don't explain to us in depth how or why God first loved us as the rationale for how and why we should love others."

The bottom line is, I think, the church needs *teaching* not spiritual fast food. Disciples need to *learn* (in all its content and formats). They need Godly *discipline*. They should stop being *consumers* of religion and become *givers* and *servants*.

*Then*, Lord willing, there will be change and transformation in every area -- because the Truth (not spiritual junk food) will set us free to serve God and others for the sake of the Gospel.

To put it another way, ideas have consequences. Think about the *right* ideas -- biblical ideas -- and results inevitably follow.