

# Discerning New Evangelicalism

## Lesson Thirteen

### Avoiding the Anthropocentricity of New Evangelicalism

The driving impetus of the Market Driven philosophy in Church Growth Seminars proposes a view of potential church members (*Seekers*) as *customers* to which the church should cater to what those customers want in a church service and atmosphere. This is what I call *Catering To The Carnal* and is how I define anthropocentricity. This is a serious distortion of God's mandate for the church.

“<sup>3</sup> For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: <sup>4</sup> (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) <sup>5</sup> Casting down imaginations {*logismos*, human reasoning that is hostile to true, separated, holy Christianity}, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Corinthians 10: 3-5).

Somewhere, in the last hundred years, the assembling of the church has been changed from its intended purpose. Scripturally, the church assembly is defined as a place for worship, prayer and the edification of the saints to mature them and prepare them to do the “work of the ministry” in their everyday worlds (Ephesians 4:12-16; evangelism). Today the church assembly has evolved into a place to gather *mixed multitudes* (Exodus 12:38, the first example of *Seekers* in the Bible) of people with the hope they will stay long enough to be inculcated (to fix something firmly in somebody's mind through frequent and forceful repetition) with the *gospel* (watered down and flavored for palatability) and get saved.

This all defines the historical time Paul warned about in II Timothy chapters three and four. It is the day of carnality of the “lukewarm,” Laodician church that Christ spoke of in Revelation chapter 3. It is the day of the Carnival Church of Mixed Multitudes.

“<sup>1</sup> This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. <sup>2</sup> For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, <sup>4</sup> Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; <sup>5</sup> Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (II Timothy 3:1-5).

There are two phrases in II Timothy 3:4-5 that are particularly relevant to the anthropocentric church. The first is “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” The second is “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.” The first refers to their priorities in life. God takes second place to the pursuit of pleasure (entertainment) in their lives. The second is the reason why those priorities are distorted. Though they have a semblance of “godliness” (piety towards God, holiness, reverence of God) they deny the intrinsic “power” of God that comes with living separate from sin and the pursuit of worldly pleasures. The word “denying” is translated from the Greek word *arneomai* (ar-neh'-om-ahee), meaning to abnegate (to give up or renounce something). I believe the intent of the verse is not about denying the power that God has. It is about giving up or renouncing that there is any spiritual power connected with being separated from worldliness and being consecrated to God.

“<sup>1</sup> I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Timothy 4:1-4).

**Anthropocentricity is what the Word of God calls *ear tickling and men-pleasing*.** Its emphasis is upon entertaining and gathering a crowd rather than edification and building a church of committed, separated, holy, soul winning believers in Jesus Christ intent upon impacting their world for Christ.

“<sup>1</sup> For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: <sup>2</sup> But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. <sup>3</sup> For our exhortation *was* not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: <sup>4</sup> But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. <sup>5</sup> For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God *is* witness: <sup>6</sup> Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor *yet* of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ” (I Thessalonians 2:1-6).

**A definitive aspect of New Evangelicalism is that they often take an anthropocentric (*Mixed Multitude, Seeker Sensitive*) approach to worship and methodology as opposed to a doxological approach.** An anthropocentric church is one that puts the wants of those that attend (regardless of how carnal or worldly those wants are) above what man needs (the confrontation with the absolutes of God’s Word). The word *anthropocentric* refers to that philosophy of life that considers man as the central fact, or final aim of the universe. It can also refer to perceiving of everything in the universe in terms of human values.

**Most New Evangelicals would deny being anthropocentric theologically.** However the real evidence of their anthropocentricity is in their application of Biblical truth and their practices of worship. This is especially evident in the *Willow Creek Fellowship of Churches* (Bill Hybels) and their *user friendly* philosophy of ministry (also known as the *Purpose Driven Church*; Rick Warrens) when it should more readily be defined as the *Market Driven Church*.

**Central to all of this is the Barthian position on inspiration of Scripture.** When a New Evangelical takes the Barthian position on inspiration (i.e., that the central purpose of the Bible is soteriological; i.e. a soteriological missional vision telling people how to be saved) **this generates an anthropocentric distortion in the New Evangelical’s methodology in both worship and evangelism.** This distortion results from an overemphasis of God’s love for mankind in His work of redemption while seemingly ignoring the fact that the intent of redemption is to restore man to righteousness and holiness so that a saved person can once again bring glory to God (a doxological missional vision) and have “fellowship” with Him. This distortion impacts almost everything the New Evangelical does.

When the focus of a preaching/worship service is on the people who attend, rather than upon proclaiming the “whole counsel of God, knowing God, worshipping Him and bringing glory to Him, a number of things usually happen. **First, the attitudes of the people attending those church services change.** Church services become more like a casual social gathering where friends meet friends and discuss the issues and trials of life. The assembly of the church becomes a sociological event or an entertainment event with little or no acknowledgement of God (even though the Bible may be opened and *God talk* is spoken). There is little consideration that the participant is entering into the presence of God for the purposes of worship, spiritual edification (growth) and being involved in the spiritual dynamic of the Holy Spirit’s ministry of conviction and illumination within that assembly.

Often, the focus of *Bible teaching* is on helping people understand how they need to live in order to be a better husband, wife, parent, friend, employer/employee (there is seldom any *real* preaching, i.e., the spiritual dynamic of the confrontation of sin and doctrinal inconsistencies with truth). When the focus is on these things rather than bringing glory to our heavenly Father and restoring people to a right relationship with Him through conviction and repentance of sin, these things reduce church services to group counseling sessions reducing church assemblies to psychology clinics rather than the spiritual training centers for evangelism and *living worship* that they ought to be.

Contemporary Christian Music is used because it appeals to the people. This is the main difference between CCM and sacred music. CCM is used to appeal to nature of *Mixed Multitudes* (to entertain mixed crowds of co-mingled lost people and people professing to be saved). Contrary to this, sacred music is intended to lift the heart of *believers* in worship to God (doxological purpose). Lost people do not enjoy or understand sacred music because they have no understanding of its purpose in worship.

**Secondly, this anthropocentric distortion impacts what people do and the way they do it.** In a *doxological* focus on worship and ministry, pleasing God and bringing Him glory is the motivation behind everything that is done. In an anthropocentric approach to worship and ministry, pleasing man (or not offending man with truth) is the motivation behind everything being done. This reduces worship services to entertainment services. This generates a very externalistic, image projecting kind of Christianity. Although it can result in a *Peer Pressure Spirituality*, it almost completely eliminates any possibility of a Holy Spirit produced spirituality that thinks about pleasing the Lord with our attitudes and practices of life and truly worshipping Him in “spirit and in truth.”

**I believe anthropocentricity was the dynamic behind Aaron’s building of the “golden calf” (Exodus 32:1-6).** It is not that they rejected YEHWEH for idols. The simple fact is that in their carnality they simply wanted a physical representation of YEHWEH to worship. There is little doubt where this idea for the “golden calf” came from. It came from the influence of the “mixed multitude.” The “mixed multitude” determined the *form* worship was to take. The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary makes the following statement:

“The *Hebrew* word rendered ‘gods’ is simply the name of God in its plural form. The image made was single, and therefore it would be imputing to the Israelites a greater sin than they were guilty of, to charge them with renouncing the worship of the true God for idols. The fact is, that they required, like children, to have something to strike their senses, and as the Shekinah, ‘the glory of God,’ of which they had hitherto enjoyed the sight, was now veiled, they wished for some visible material object as the symbol of the divine presence, which should go before them as the pillar of fire had done.”

**Aaron’s reasoning for justifying what he did is very similar to the arguments we hear today for the justification for the use of CCM in *Contemporary Worship Services*.**

“<sup>21</sup> And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? <sup>22</sup> And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they *are set* on mischief. <sup>23</sup> For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. <sup>24</sup> And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. So they gave *it* me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. <sup>25</sup> And when Moses saw that the people *were* naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto *their* shame among their enemies:) <sup>26</sup> Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who *is* on the LORD’S side? *let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. <sup>27</sup> And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, *and* go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. <sup>28</sup> And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. <sup>29</sup> For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves to day to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day” (Exodus 32:21-29).

**Aaron’s reasoning for justifying what he did is very similar to the arguments we hear today.**

1. Moses (the Law Giver) was gone and there was no clear direction from the Lord (v 22-23, i.e, the Bible is *silent* or *neutral* in this area and we are no longer under the Law, but under *grace*; meaning we have *liberty* to do things any way we want as long as they get the right results. )
2. Look what happened (miraculous results), it must have been the right thing to do or God would not have blessed it (pragmatics; v 24)

**However, notice how simply Moses cuts through this carnal, ecumenical rhetoric (v 25).** The people were “naked.” What more is needed to be said to define the error of all of this. This was pretty remarkable evidence of worldliness contrary to the holiness of God. Some of the evidence of modern day anthropocentricity may not be quite as evident, but, in principle, it is very close. Christ tells us spiritual nakedness will be a characteristic of the *Christianity* of the last days prior to His second coming.

“<sup>14</sup> And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; <sup>15</sup> I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: <sup>18</sup> I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Revelation 3:14-18).

**Notice that Moses’ solution for correcting this serious corruption in worship was that of severe church discipline.** Three-thousand people were removed from the congregation (v 28, probably most of them were of the “mixed multitude”) and proclaimed the remaining people “consecrated” because they were willing to deal as severely as required to purify themselves of this carnality (v 29).

**The type of music used and how it is presented (in this context, *performed*) is often a *Red Flag* to New Evangelicalism.**

“<sup>5</sup> And when Aaron saw *it* {*the golden Calf*}, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow *is* a feast to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play” (Exodus 32:5-6).

This certainly would be descriptive of much of what is being done in the anthropocentric *Worship Centers* of modern day Christianity. Sunday becomes a “feast” day for carnal celebration rather than solemn worship.

### **Three Governing Principles For Worship**

1. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40).
2. “God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
3. Things used for worship must be distinctively holy (separate) from the things used by the world.

“<sup>11</sup> Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests *concerning* the law, saying, <sup>12</sup> If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. <sup>13</sup> Then said Haggai, If *one that is* unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. <sup>14</sup> Then answered Haggai, and said, So *is* this people, and so *is* this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so *is* every work of their hands; and that which they offer there *is* unclean” (Haggai 2:11-14).

If the *performance* and the *performer* are more prominent than the message of the music, the intent is entertainment not edification. Worship music is not a *performance*. Worship music is a proclamation of truth with God honoring and men edifying music. That is why it offends me to hear people clap or applaud in church services. That is the way the world gives glory to those who entertain them. Congregations should be offended when a performer steals God’s glory by presenting the message of the hymn in such a way that it brings applause or glory to the performer rather than praise and worship to God. **A message that calls a person to obedience to God or worship through carnal, worldly methods is a spiritual antithesis.**

Dr. Ernest D. Pickering in his book **The Tragedy of Compromise** (Bob Jones University Press) says in the chapter appropriately called *Salad Bar Sanctuaries*:

“A perusal of the New Testament will reveal an absence of attention to the entertainment factor in the worship and evangelization ministries of the church. Emphasis is focused upon what people *need*, not what they *want*” (emphasize mine).

He then goes on to quote from an article in the Wall Street Journal featuring the Second Baptist Church of Houston, Texas (“**Mighty Fortresses: Megachurches Strive to Be All Things to All Parishioners,**” Wall Street Journal, 13 May 1991).

“Persons attending that church will ‘catch a Broadway-style show with a religious message . . . They offer as much in the way of activities and entertainment as they do religion.’ The church is successful, claims the article, because it has stripped away ‘old hymns and . . . Denominational dogma.’ In place of these items ‘teenagers sway and clap at Solid Rock.’ . . . The church, we are told, ‘is primarily designed for a generation unversed in theology, essentially nonsectarian and unsentimental about the old neighborhood church. As churchgoers, they are pragmatic and pressed for time, and they care passionately about . . . Dazzling entertainment.’ The church offers exercise bikes, jacuzzis, and in house cinema. They once featured a wrestling match with church employees in order to draw a Sunday night crowd.”

When the music cannot be distinguished from the music of the world (regardless of how edifying the message), the focus is not upon pleasing God or bringing Him glory. The focus is upon pleasing (entertaining) man. When a rhythm guitar, drums or even a rhythm organ puts a background *beat* (Off Beat or Back Beat) to the music, this is definitely a *Red Flag* to New Evangelicalism in that it reveals anthropocentricity

Dr. Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel in their book **Music In The Balance** (Majesty Music) accentuate the fact that the wrong kind of music actually generates a carnal sensuality in those who listen to it. It is almost unimaginable to me that anyone could justify introducing this kind of music into a worship or evangelistic service of a church. Commenting on an article published in **Newsweek** magazine (“**The Wizards of Sound,**” a “Wizard” is a rock music sound engineer) they write:

“What was their goal? To achieve a sensual sound. Rhythm is truly physical, and by extension the sensual part of music, because it is the part of music to which the body responds.”

This anthropocentric distortion is often communicated by the rationalization of the use of worldly music and worldly entertainment to attract crowds in order to present the gospel. The distortion is *appealing* to man’s carnality in an attempt to generate spirituality. This is more than a paradox. It is antithetical. This is a great distortion in that even if a person gets saved through such methods, the distortion gives that person permission to continue living in worldly amusements thus eliminating his ability to ever bring God glory through his life.

“<sup>15</sup> Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (I John 2:15-16).

**Another area of impact of the anthropocentric approach to worship and ministry is the content of teaching and preaching.** In the anthropocentric approach to worship and ministry there is a natural tendency to avoid anything that might seem offensive or divisive (the New Evangelical term for this is Positivism). This *Red Flag* is often expressed by the statement, “Focus on the positive things of Scripture and not the negatives.”

George Barna in his book **The Frog in the Kettle** makes a comment that illustrates this anthropocentric movement away from dogmatic preaching.

“By 2000, Americans will be even less interested in absolutes, preferring those perspectives which allow for relative values to gain credence. Casting issues in black-and-white mode will disgust many people.”

This of course requires a complete distortion of Scripture in that the majority of Scripture deals with correcting false doctrine and the disobedience and carnal lifestyles that result. Of course, a preacher could accentuate only those parts of Scripture that are positive, but in order to do so he would have to be very selective. He would also have to ignore the vast majority of what God has said. Doing this is a great distortion of Pastoral responsibility (Acts 20:17-31).

“<sup>17</sup> And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup> And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, <sup>19</sup> Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: <sup>20</sup> And how I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: <sup>23</sup> Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. <sup>24</sup> But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. <sup>26</sup> Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all *men*. <sup>27</sup> For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. <sup>28</sup> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

The New Evangelical pastor has adopted a passive role regarding his responsibilities detailed in Acts 20:17-31 much like the world’s pattern of passive parenting. This is a serious contradiction against the Biblical pattern established by Paul in Acts 20. The four central responsibilities of the Pastor regarding the Church are:

1. “Take heed;” from the Greek word *prosecho* (pros-ekh’-o), the context implies giving careful attention with the general idea of guarding and guiding
2. “Feed the church of God;” from the Greek word *poimaino* (poy-mah’-ee-no) meaning to provide pasture for nourishment. The idea is to teach spiritual truth.
3. “Watch;” from the Greek word *gregoreuo* (gray-gor-yoo’-o), the specific, cautious guarding of the flock against attacks from wild beasts, or, as in the case of the Church, false teachers and false teaching
4. “Warn;” from the Greek word *noutheteo* (noo-thet-eh’-o) referring to confrontational admonition or exhortation

**Another area that accentuates the anthropocentric approach to preaching is the *dummying down* of our churches.** The common phrase I hear that expresses this is “never preach above a “fifth or sixth grade level.” Again Dr. Pickering in his book **Tragedy of Compromise** (page 141) addresses this issue.

“Modern Americans have been raised on a steady diet of entertainment. Television has affected our culture to a very large extent. Preachers are now confronted every Sunday with members who have spent hours that week in viewing the very latest in entertainment. Television has made the general public very entertainment conscious. It has definitely had an adverse impact upon people’s ability (and desire) to think and to follow reasoned arguments. Since preaching is based upon reasoning and the orderly marshaling of ideas, it becomes difficult for many moderns to follow exposition of the Bible.”

The anthropocentric church will demand an *easy listening* preacher and the anthropocentric (“ear tickling”) pastor will readily become one. The anthropocentric preacher will take all the meat out of God’s Word and preach *Lollypop* sermons full of *Puppy-dog* truths. At best, he will teach non-definitive doctrine in a non-applicational way. Dr. Pickering goes on to say (page 141):

“In the light of this trend, however, the preacher must ask, ‘Is genuine, acceptable preaching a declaration of what God wants man to hear or of what man wants God to say?’ Historically, preaching has been viewed as the art of communicating to men, in language understandable to them, the timeless truths from the Bible about God and His works. The starting point for preaching has been God and not man.”

This is not the case with most New Evangelical pastors. For them, everything is about man. Biblical preaching does not bring God down to man’s level. **The purpose of Bible preaching is not to make truth relevant to man.** Biblical preaching seeks to raise fallen man to new spiritual heights, to walk with God on the holy ground of His absolutes and to restore the image of God defaced by sin so that the lost world might know Him and His love for them. That is a doxological missional vision. The loss of this doxological vision by New Evangelicals has caused them to also lose their doxological purpose.

**Discerning New Evangelicalism**  
**Lesson Thirteen**  
**Avoiding the Anthropocentricity of New Evangelicalism**

1. Define the word anthropocentric. \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. How is I Thessalonians 2:1-6 a rejection of both an anthropocentric approach to worship and an anthropocentric approach to evangelism? \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Discuss the central differences between a doxological approach to worship and evangelism compared to an anthropocentric approach. \_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Discuss the impact of an anthropocentric approach to worship on the attitudes of those attending this type of worship service and why this is such a dangerous thing. \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. Discuss how an anthropocentric approach to worship impacts what people do and the way they do it. \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Discuss how anthropocentricity determines the kind of music used and how it is presented. \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. Discuss why *clapping* or *applauding* in a church service reveals anthropocentricity. \_\_\_\_\_  
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8. Discuss the merit of the following statement by Dr. Earnest Pickering: “A perusal of the New Testament will reveal an absence of attention to the entertainment factor in the worship and evangelization ministries of the church. Emphasis is focused upon what people *need*, not what they *want*” (emphasize mine). \_\_\_\_\_  
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9. Discuss the use of *background rhythm* (the *Back Beat* or *Off Beat*) as it relates to sensuality and why this is absolutely inappropriate for worship services (or anything else for that matter). \_\_\_\_\_  
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10. Discuss how anthropocentricity is revealed in the preaching of New Evangelicals. \_\_\_\_\_  
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