

*The Itching Ears of Unsubstantiated Estimates*



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*"...the time will come when people will not listen to the true teachings but will find many more teachers who please them by saying things they want to hear."*

*2 Timothy 4:3 NCV*

When the Apostle Paul was warning Timothy about people who would turn away from the truth because they would rather be pleased with a deception than disappointed with accuracy, he could easily have been talking about churches listening to lower than normal building costs. Certainly all of us want to know that we are getting the best possible price for anything we are buying. It is our nature to "shop around" in order to find the best deal. There is nothing wrong with looking for the best deal.

The problem arises when we begin to believe that the "best deal" is unbelievably lower than all the other deals. In most venues, we accept this without question. The old adage "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is" stands to reason. For instance, if we know that a new Cadillac costs \$50,000 and someone tells us that he can get us the exact same new Cadillac for \$10,000, we would dismiss it as a wild-eyed scheme.

There are times, however, when we want so badly to believe that we are getting something extraordinary that we listen to bad information and grasp at those wild-eyed schemes. Certainly all of us have received unbelievable offers of great richness in our email that we dismiss without another thought because we realize the offer is "too good to be true." Yet there are hundreds of people everyday who fall for such a scheme and lose large amounts of money because they want so badly to believe these offers are true and that all their dreams are just a click away.

This same principal is true in the church building industry. In today's construction market, it costs a substantial amount of money to build a church. Bricks and mortar and lumber cost a certain amount of money. And it seems the cost of such supplies is escalating daily. Yet still, we hear of churches that believe a new church can be designed and constructed for \$50.00 to \$100.00 a square foot. In actuality, the HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems that are used in most churches today can cost nearly \$50.00 a square foot!

Where this belief of extraordinarily low cost becomes tragic is when a church believes the cost will be much lower than is realistic and, therefore, over-designs their new facility to the degree that they can never afford to build what they have designed. This is a

common problem in churches. A professional in the church building industry will tell a church the true cost of constructing their new facility, but the church refuses to believe the estimated cost because they want to hear a much lower price. Consequently, someone, whether it be a residential home builder, a small-time contractor, or someone who builds farm buildings, tells them the estimate is far too high and the building should be able to be built for half the estimated costs. The church begins to have itchy ears because they want to believe a deception instead of relying on the truth.

What is the answer to this dilemma? The same as it is for other such "good deals." First of all, trust the professionals for an honest appraisal of the true costs of the project. If you doubt the estimate, hire an independent estimator to give you his cost analysis of the project. If someone tells you an extraordinarily low price, ask that person for his level of experience in building churches. You will be surprised how many so-called experts have never really been involved in a church building project. If they still contend that their estimate is accurate, ask them to document their costs and to put everything in writing and put their money where their mouth is by guaranteeing their estimate, and this process usually separates the chaff from the wheat.

Most of all, remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Consequently, it is much better to be realistic about the cost of building from the very start of the project than it is to listen to low estimates, wanting to believe that you are going to get something that you're not, only to find out much too late that you're actually getting nothing at all.