

Two Years Later: Where Are We Now?

(Part 6)

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Online ministry efforts have doubtless expanded exponentially since the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It expedited my own plans for engaging in online ministry—and I am sure it did the same for many others.

I shared quite a few of my own thoughts on this theme in parts two and three of this series. I have also described at length how the shutdowns provided the time and opportunity—and compelled me by necessity—to launch the type of online outreach that I had envisioned from the beginning of my service with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry.

Now, I believe that our next question as church and ministry leaders ought to be: How can we think strategically, and prepare ourselves and our ministries, before we are ambushed by the next crisis?

Once again, we're drawing on the experience of Steven Lee, the founder of SermonAudio.com, in looking at this question. I interviewed him regarding The Vault, which SermonAudio is building on the campus of Bob Jones University, and related issues.

"This whole pandemic—there is a lot that we can say that's negative about it," Lee stated. "But, obviously, I think that churches and ministries are seizing upon this tool to get the gospel out far and wide."

Lee was referring to using the tools of technology in broadcasting our message—a practice that many ministers embraced during the shutdowns of 2020.

"As far as the actual technology goes, it has gotten people aware—there are other ways, and very good ways that we can be using these tools for our advantage. I think that the pandemic served that purpose," he said.

"Maybe previously they were sitting on the fence, or they did not see it as important—it was sort of a secondary or side thing," Lee stated. "Well, for a period there, it was the only way of reaching people. Now they can see, 'Wow, this is actually very useful.'"

Lee is also seeing a difference in the quality of the media that churches are producing since the pandemic, as well as watching the number of churches that utilize it continue to grow.

"We have had a number of churches that have come on board to broadcast with us, and they are finding it to be a wonderful tool," he said. "But I also think—and I find this interesting to watch on the site—it has introduced these churches, especially the

smaller ones, to experimenting with more content. Yes, they are still preaching their Sunday messages. But they are now putting out podcasts, they are now putting out videos—short videos that people can consume. They are understanding that people like to listen to content, and they are putting a little bit more polish into their content, and I think it is a good thing.”

What other effects are these “perilous times” (2 Tim. 3:1) having upon ministries?

Lee said that the pandemic and the corresponding shutdowns have “heightened” our “appreciation for the local assembly of God’s people.”

He stated: “It certainly has made us a lot more appreciative of the gathering together of God’s people. That has become a lot more well defined in people’s minds.”

Looking ahead, Lee reiterated the need to learn from the last set of crises—and become prepared to negotiate future ones.

“I think that we have to be careful not to fearmonger, but it would be naïve to think it’s just sort of this blip that happened, and we’ll just continue on the way we’ve always continued on,” he explained. “I think this is something of a test, with the powers that be—that’s just my opinion—and I think that leaders around the world have gotten a taste for power, like they have never had before, and it is going to be really hard for them just to say, ‘Well, that was nice for the few years that we had it, and let’s just move on to the way it used to be.’”

He added, “I think that what we are all finding is that people are very easily controlled. Christians have to be like those that are awake—we can’t be people that are just putting our heads in the sand and just assuming that there is no agenda that is being driven. I think that is very naïve.”

SermonAudio is preparing a colossal response of its own to these challenging times—in the hope that it will equip churches all around the globe before another crisis falls. Their project, of course, is The Vault. We’ll conclude this series next time by considering how *cancel culture* demonstrates the immediacy of its necessity.

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