



Pinks Walls for the Pastor's Study

For most technical and specialized subjects we put our trust in experts. When we're sick we go to a qualified doctor. When the car isn't working, or the computer crashes, we go to a mechanic or IT specialist. We realize our limitations and know that we do not have the proper training to solve these problems. Yet when it comes to art and design, many people forego the rules that apply to most other areas of life.

I don't mean that when someone wants a portrait painted he or she will give it a try before hiring a professional. I'm talking about the elements of taste that dictate many of the choices we make each day. There are colors we tend to like, patterns we enjoy. Our closets and home décor reflect these. But when it comes to visual design in worship we often let anybody willing to volunteer have a go at it.

Please don't assume I am belittling the theological training of our pastors, the music training of our choir directors and worship leaders, or the desire to help that other folks in the congregation may have. After all, not everyone is willing to volunteer in the church. Still, I do want to share a short story about why and how this is an important consideration.

When I was in graduate school for my terminal degree in art my best friend was my pastor. We are about the same age and I first came to the church about a week after he had arrived. We were both there at the beginning of a huge growth in the church. I served as an adult Sunday School teacher, a worship team member, and prayer partner to the pastor. He knew me better than anyone else and fully trusted my opinion on many subjects that pertained to the life of the congregation.

When his office and the secretary's office were being remodeled, because of the growth in church membership and programs, he casually asked me one day what color I thought the walls of his study/office should be painted. My immediate response was, "Are you asking because you want me to back up an idea you already have, or do you really want my educated opinion? Are you going to actually trust that opinion?" He knew I had him.

"I guess I'll go with the second one and put my faith in your expertise," came his reluctant response.

Considering the furnishings, the color of the wood, the color of the carpet, and the wallpaper border going up next to the ceiling, I made my call. Pink. His eyes grew wide. I explained that it was really white with the lightest tint of red (or pink) in it and that it would appear as white once it was on the walls and the wallpaper border was up. The reasoning was not just the décor, but the usage of the room. His office was used for counseling of many kinds. Individuals and couples would sit in that room facing some of life's most difficult challenges. They might even be confessing things they had told no other person before. The color of the walls needed to be light, warm, and comforting. That counted out blues and greens; lavender simply wasn't an option. Yellow is a color that evokes sickness, uneasiness, and conflict. Red, or pink, was what was left.

He told me to go pick up the paint, adding that he hoped I knew what I was doing. Since I am far more interested in painting canvases than walls, I was not going to be the person applying the paint. The pastor told me later that a couple people were not too happy that he was using pink. But after all the work was done and the border was up (so that the pinkish wall and white ceiling no longer abutted one another) I actually had one man come and apologize for thinking I was crazy to make that choice. The room was warm and comforting and those who had never seen it when it actually looked a little pink were none the wiser. The walls were just white.

The pastor's office and the setting in which we worship are obviously two different things, but the message is the same. When it comes to the visual elements of worship—including things as mundane as the color of the paint on the walls—there are people trained in visual design who have more insight than the masses. Just because someone can put together a pretty gift basket or decorate a living room that everyone else envies does not mean that that person is the most qualified to make the aesthetic decisions for the worship setting.

If we bring in the experts to build the structure then we need similar experts to prepare the visual elements. Our worship of God deserves nothing less than the best we have to offer.