

The Battle for Truth?

Part 6 – What is The Church?

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INTRODUCTION

Society has changed. People are driven by stimulation, sensation, excitement, and entertainment. Interview the average person on why they do not go to church, and you will receive an answer like, “its boring.”

During Jesus’ earthly ministry, people turned out in multitudes. Many walked for miles to listen to what He had to say. I do not think they would say He was boring. God’s Word should not be boring!

2

INTRODUCTION

Instead of dealing with the issues in society that caused people to see the church as “boring,” many churches have turned to worldly programs to attract the “seeker” into their ministries.

Churches became entertainment centers and pulpits have become concert stages.

Though these things are not entirely bad, they can become a danger if it supplants the truth. I have attended churches where the “worship” team gives a 50-minute concert, and the pastor gives a 10-minute sermonette.

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INTRODUCTION

For many, the church has become a business. For our tax exempt status, we had to incorporate and follow state and federal guidelines. Have you ever wondered why we have “deacons” and also “trustees”?

Many churches then place “businessmen” on their boards. It is easy to shift from “God’s values and purposes,” to “centering on worldly standards such as profit and popularity.”

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INTRODUCTION

Other “churches” have become moments to a man. This happens when people follow a person rather than the “Word of God” that person is supposed to proclaim. It is easy for a pastor to use the people to meet his own egotistical needs rather than seeing his role as a shepherd to serve and meet the needs of others. I once had a local pastor tell me how much they appreciate “feeder churches” like ours who could funnel people into their ministries.

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INTRODUCTION

A “ministerium” is where local pastors get together to mutually encourage each other and talk about the needs of the community and how they can work together to meet those needs.

I stopped attending because it felt like a competition of which church was the “most successful” each week. The two questions I was asked were “how big was your offering?” and “how many people came?”

Are these really the marks of a successful church? Are churches in “competition” with each other?

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What is the Church?

The church consists of people not buildings. Fellowship, worship and ministry are all conducted by people, not buildings. Church structures facilitate the role of God's people, but they do not fulfill it.

The True Church is often called the "universal church." It is made up of all "True believers." A True believer is one who has placed their faith and trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sin. True faith is evidenced by a changed life where one has turned from sin and the things of this world, and to seeking the things of heaven above.

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What is the Church?

The church is the "body of Jesus" here on earth. We (you and me) are His hands, feet, and voice. We are to proclaim the Truth, love, mercy and grace of God. We are to go into the entire world and preach the life changing gospel of who Jesus is and what He has done to redeem those who are willing to repent and turn to Him (Matthew 28:18-20).

The church is to disciple believers in matters of faith and doctrine. We are to edify (build up) each other to do the "work" that God has for each of us to do (Ephesians 4).

The church encourages each other to "mortify the deeds of the flesh" and put on the "things of Christ" (Galatians 5:16-26).

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What Does the Church Do?

The church is not a building, but a body of believers with a specific nature and purpose. These biblical roles or ministries of the church are foundational to it. What are these roles? They are many, but key to any church are foundations in worship, edification and evangelism.

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What Does the Church Do?

Worship is God-centered and Christ-centered. It is not about entertaining Christians with flashy displays or presentations, but about expressing our love by worshiping our Creator. We are to praise and glorify God in worship. As such, every Christian needs to be part of regular fellowship and worship.

Edification is also a role of the church. It involves edifying believers, but also nurturing, building up or helping believers to mature in Christ. To this end, churches are tasked with a variety of ministries such as Bible study, education, praying for one another, acts of genuine hospitality and more.

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What Does the Church Do?

Evangelism is also a key role of the church. This means reaching out to a lost world with the Good News about Jesus. Since people often have questions or doubts about Christ and Christianity, knowing the truth and being able to defend it (apologetics) is also part of the role of the church. But beyond evangelism in the sense of reaching out with the gospel, the church must also express compassion and mercy by helping others. In following Christ's example to love others, the church, too, must seek to make a real difference in the world while not neglecting to share the message of Christ.

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What Does the Church Do?

If a church fails to fulfill any of these key roles – worship, edification, evangelism – then the church is not functioning as God intends. Granted, there are times when churches face challenges and struggles to one degree or another, but a healthy church seeks to overcome such challenges in a way that honors God and His intentions for His church.

I like the definition from C. S. Lewis, "The Christian church is not a building, but a body of believers united in Christ. Its role is to worship God, nurture and edify and reach out to a suffering world with the saving message of the gospel as well as the practical compassion and mercy exemplified in Christ."

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Why Meet Together?

If the church is the body of believers and not the building, why do we meet together?

We are commanded to. God in Creation set up the Sabbath Day for man. We need it!

One day to set aside the things of this world and focus on the things that are really important – God, family and community. The early church moved the day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to Sunday when Christ arose. The 10 Commandments were given to Israel, but express God's will for all people. The only one of the 10 not reiterated in the New Testament is the Sabbath, but we are commanded to gather together.

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

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Why Meet Together?

Church is a time for learning. This aspect was reinforced by COVID restrictions. When we were banned by the government from meeting "in person", we shifted to meeting online.

There are also many good preachers who have TV and radio programs. For too many, these resources have become a replacement for gathering together. I have talked to several people who are not attending church and how important it is that they meet together in a church gathering. The most common excuse is "I watch online."

Though I am glad that if they are not going to attend personally, that they at least are involved in some sort of Biblical instruction. The problem is that Biblical instruction is just one aspect of our Sunday Services.

We need community. You need us, and we need you! People need to be encouraged, prayed for, and corrected. Believers also have been given spiritual gifts and talents that they are responsible to use.

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Why Meet Together?

Gathering together is also a time of community worship! God intended us to worship in private and as a community of faith. The Old Testament Temple was filled with music, praise, and worship. Some of the Psalms like 24 were constructed in such a way that the Levites would sing one part and the people would respond with the next line.

When we get to heaven, we will meet in the “Grand Reunion” as a church before the throne of God and we will sing praises to our God.

What we do here is a reflection of that. We lift up our voices to praise our God together. Have you ever been in a large conference of a thousand people and then sing together. There are no words that can explain this experience. Let me add that worship is much more than singing, but we will deal with that later.

We need to meet together for our mutual benefit in obedience to God.

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Why Meet Together?

There is a story of a pastor in the 1800's who went to visit one of his flock who had not been to church in quite a while. The man explained that he did not need to go to church as he could worship God from the quietness of his home. The wise pastor did not say a word but went silently to the fire, pulled out a glowing ember from the fire and set it on the stone tile in front of the fireplace. At first the ember burned and glowed brightly, but as it sat alone the flame slowly went out and the glow dimmed and faded. The man caught the message of the illustration. We need each other. We need the mutual encouragement to keep going strong. When alone our fire for Christ will begin to go out.

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

A lion will attack the straggler who is alone rather than the herd!

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Problems with a Wrong View of Church.

When we take our eyes off from Christ and onto other things we fall into a false view of Church.

A False View of Success

This is where a church puts its focus on numbers, finances, a building, or a host of other things. God's work done His way will not lack His supply.

You are God's church, and He will bring in those who He wants to be here. God has the right to move people around where they are needed. However, we should remember the churches of the book of Revelation.

If we do not keep our "first love" and be faithful to the work He has given us, Jesus will remove our light and give it to another...

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Problems with a Wrong View of Church.

A Misdirection of Focus

Our focus must always be on Jesus and His work. The church today is trading worship for entertainment. It has been said, "what you attract people with is what you will keep them with." The danger of this is lies in that the focus in on self – "what I like" and "how does it make me feel?"

An improper focus on self self can lead to legalism where the focus is on the external appearance rather than the internal conformity to Christ. The focus can be on fixing the outward behavior, rather than introducing them to Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit transform them.

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Problems with a Wrong View of Church.

A Dangerous Trap

When a church focuses on numbers, a person, and finances, it **compromises** what the church is to do.

The church cannot denounce sin, exercise church discipline, or preach the hard things of Scripture. Taking a bold stand on the word of God can and will offend people. If the focus is on numbers and money, one cannot risk offending a person where they might leave taking their money with them.

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Problems with a Wrong View of Church.

A Dangerous Trap

This mentality also contaminates how we see other churches.

If the goal is to build a church by numbers, then other churches can become the “competition.” The focus becomes on bigger and more extravagant programs that draw people in, even if they are enticed from other churches. It is easier to steal sheep from other churches than do the hard work of evangelism and discipleship.

Such a view sets up divisions and mistrust between churches that are supposed to be united in Christ.

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Problems with a Wrong View of Church.

The Result

When a church loses focus, it may not be “boring”, but it is no longer relevant. If it does not repent and turn back to the core objectives Jesus gave us, then that church runs the risk of losing the working and power of the Holy Spirit. If a church was compromised and looking at building monuments and programs for their own purpose, would they really notice if the Spirit of God left????

During COVID, our government not only saw the church as nonrelevant, but also nonessential. Liquor stores and abortion clinics were open, but the church was silenced. I know this was a spiritual battle, but very few “believers” complained...

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So What ...

What about us???

We are not perfect. However, I and the leaders of in this “local” church want our focus to be on Jesus – who He is, what He has done, and what He wants us to do!

Everything must be done in His leading, His way, and for His glory.

Each person here who has accepted Jesus’ gift of salvation is here for a reason. We need you (not because you are a number) because God has given you gifts and talents that are meant to be used here. Our job as a church is to help you find that place and develop those abilities. Is it scary and hard? – Yes! But you are not alone. The Spirit will empower, and we are here to encourage. Be brave! We are the church!

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