

American Church Designed by Whom?

Ask any good Pastor what his job is and he will tell you, “My job is to bring glory to God through by feeding and guiding the flock of God’s people, the congregation of my Church. I am to use the Word of God to feed them, to help them grow in knowledge, understanding and relationship with their Heavenly Father who has adopted them. I am to lead them into what is spiritually sound and protect them from what is false.” Do you agree that is a good basic summery of what a Pastor’s job is? I think most would agree.

Before I continue I must ask you to free your mind. Please put aside every notion you have of what the structure of a Church is supposed to look like. Forget about in what order the service is supposed to flow. Forget about what the ministries are supposed to do, and how they are to do it. Please try to bury years of experience and culture for just a few minutes to see if what is said here is Biblical makes sense logically.

Ready? Here we go... If the above description of a Pastor’s job is accurate, then that explains why most sermons are the way they are. Almost all sermons are structured to feed God’s Word to the congregation, made up of believers. OK, that seems Biblical. In the 21st chapter of John’s Gospel we see Jesus instructed Peter to “feed His sheep”, which he did for the rest of his life.

Now here is the problem...

Almost all modern churches are trying like crazy to get people to come in and try them out. We hear ads on the radio saying, “We are the relaxed church for people like you” and billboards inviting people to try a church that, “Builds families” or acknowledges that “We all need choices”. All this marketing is being aimed at getting unsaved people in church. The big question is... Why? Now, stick with me and think about this. When visitors get to Church they will hear a message designed to feed and guide believers, they most likely will not hear the Gospel. Many preachers tie a small 2 minute snippet of “If you don’t know Jesus as your personal savior, please come forward or approach us after the service” at the end of their messages, but to an unsaved mind, that means absolutely nothing. They don’t know why they should know Jesus. They do not understand sin or God’s justice in punishing it. They may think they know who Jesus is, but most likely they have very inaccurate information about Him. They surely have very little knowledge of what the Cross was truly about.

Usually the visitors feel comfortable because the Church is deliberately making them comfortable. The average sermon touches on nothing hard or uncomfortable, so they begin attending and the church grows bigger.

These new churchgoers derive a feeling of spirituality and a sense of being a good person by attending, and to their mind they are getting right with God. Simply put, they are being transformed into being cultural churchgoers while never being told they are lost. They have never been led to the mirror that is God’s perfect law and shown that their true appearance (to God) is that of wretched sinner. They do not hear of God’s justice in sending those filled with iniquity to Hell, and they never learn of the truth of the Cross, the incredible love of a God that would take the punishment for their sins on Himself.

They are taught how to change their behavior to be like that of a good Christian, rather than being led to the one who could declare them justified and change them in the deepest core of their being (from this transformation good Christian behavior would flow naturally).

Want proof? Schedule a weekly outing to go hand out Gospel tracts in town and witness and see how many show up. Watch the faces of those in the congregation as they sing, and see how many are looking around, yawning, or daydreaming, showing no respect, reverence or thankfulness to God. Or start a prayer meeting with no discussion, only quiet earnest prayer and see how many show up on a regular basis. Don't fault these people for their lack of love, obedience and devotion to God. They have not yet been shown who they are in the light of God's Law. They don't know who Jesus really is, or what He did. They do not understand His love because when they hear of it, it is just a warm story. They have not been heartbroken over their sins and then healed by the gentle hand of a crucified savior. The whole reason they began attending Church is because they were comfortable there, but if someone lost in their sin is comfortable it means they aren't being told they are lost! The whole combination makes for a church where it is easy to make lots of friends, go to great social gatherings, see many happy faces and have lunch with a lot of people headed straight to Hell.

The fact is in the New Testament the Church is actually made up of believers. They are taught and guided by the pastor. All believers took the great commission of "Go into all the World and preach the Gospel to every creature" seriously. It was only after someone was confronted with their sin, repented, asked Christ for forgiveness and submitted themselves to His Lordship did they get invited to the Church. The "feed and protect" message of the Pastor then made sense because they were truly saved and striving to follow Jesus Christ their Lord. That is why the Church functioned like it did in Acts 2:44-47. It was not by some mandate or teaching that they lost their selfish ambitions and desires, it was because they were each changed by God before coming together with other believers in the Church.

To think we can market to sinful people, get them in our church because they will eventually get saved by seeing the difference in those around them sounds nice, but it doesn't work. The Bible does not suggest this method either, in fact, it strongly condemns this church model. Biblical church discipline wouldn't allow a church with this model to last more than an hour. (For more on that, please read the article Bizarro Church at www.ChurchSalt.com). The other explanation I hear for this American Church model is that after attending a while, people are recommended to an "Answers Class" or a "What we Believe" class. But is this class being taught by someone who fearlessly preaches repentance for the forgiveness of sins, or is it a simple recitation of the Church doctrines? Is repentance mentioned in this class? The answer is almost always "No" and the reason is because it makes people uncomfortable. It is confrontational. The New Testament is filled front to back with those who are lost being confronted with the fact that they are lost, but here in modern America we have decided in our progressed wisdom that we should get them to "Belong" before they "Believe". The modern American church structure is seriously flawed because it is based on cultural comfort rather than the Word of God. It is structured in defiant rebellion toward God.

So... if all this is true, now what? To convert from the Church most common in American culture to a New Testament church would be difficult indeed, which is why most pastors who would like to do it never will. A Church trying to make a reformation and an attempt to comply with Biblical structure may split or even close. Isn't this, out of all things, the least desirable? Maybe not. Maybe it is this radical obedience that brings glory to God's name. If cultural relevance and visible results is what we are to measure success by, then strict adherence to God's design will probably not prove to be the best path. But if success is measured by obedience to our Lord, and faith that His design will prove to be the most profitable in spite of results visible to us. So how are we to choose by which scale a Pastor and a Church should be measured? How are we to choose an appropriate design structure? Well, the choice has not been left to us, the mandate has been handed down from our Lord. The only choice truly left to us is obedience or rebellion. Do we choose faith or comfort? Do we fear and serve God, or man?

Here are a few other questions that inevitably arise from the American church model:

- + Is Church discipline practiced? Is the sanctity and reputation of God's name jealously protected by removing those in blatant sin? Or is defiant disobedience toward God tolerated in hopes they will be drawn back to God? Is God's name more important than comfort?
- + Is the membership roll carefully guarded by Godly men to ensure only those whose faith is sound are to be recorded?
- + What about the Sunday school teachers teaching the children? Were they picked to teach because of their sound Christian faith, reputations as being Godly men and women, and their desire to bring children to Christ? Or are they simply Church attendees who also have children and are taking their turn in the classroom. If they are pressured volunteers, what are they teaching the children?
- + Is there any accountability in what is being taught in the Sunday school rooms?

Thanks for Reading!

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