

“STILL CHURCH”
(A SERIES ON WHAT THE CHURCH IS
IN THE EYES OF GOD)
EPHESIANS 3:1-11
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INTRO: **WHAT IS THE CHURCH?** I am sure the answer to that question would vary quite a bit, based upon a person's understanding of scripture, as well as on one's personal opinion. Later on in our series, I will give a complete definition of the church from the biblical perspective, but at this point, as we begin the series, let me share with you some of the elements that make up the CHURCH OF GOD AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

- 1) The Church is one of three Institutions of God.
- 2) The Church is only a New Testament entity presented as a MYSTERY in the Old Testament.
- 3) The Church was founded by Jesus Christ and born on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.
- 4) The Church is made up ONLY of born again, baptized believers in Christ.
- 5) The Church is timeless and relevant on earth until Christ takes it home to Heaven in the Rapture.
- 6) The Church is presented as THE BODY, THE BRIDE AND THE BUILDING of Christ in scripture.
- 7) The Church is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God.
- 8) The Church has a distinct commission to reach the world with the Gospel of Christ.
- 9) The Church must operate according to biblical principles and not according to human opinions.
- 10) The Church is to GLORIFY GOD in all things by maintaining the message and the mandate Christ Himself has established in scripture.

With those things stated, the church is facing some interesting times in the 21st Century that threaten to ruin its effect for Christ in the world! One present day church scholar has said, *“CURRENT CHANGES BEGINNING TO OVERTAKE THE CHURCH COULD DISTINCTIVELY MARK THE TWENTH-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH. A GROWING NUMBER OF RESPECTED EVANGELICALS BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT REDIRECTION OF THE CHURCH TOWARD BEING LESS BIBLICAL AND MORE ACCEPTABLE TO MAN WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD TO A CHRIST-CONDEMNED CHURCH.”* -Richard Mayhue

QUESTION: HOW MANY LOCAL CHURCHES HAVE BEEN JUDGED BY CHRIST BECAUSE THEY HAVE WORKED TO BECOME “USER FRIENDLY,” “PSYCHOLOGICALLY DRIVEN,” AND “HUMAN CENTRIC,” INSTEAD OF BEING HOLY SPIRIT LED, FILLED AND MOTIVATED BY THE SCRIPTURE? Only God knows, but I am sure there are too many!

In recent years, a consortium of pastors, Bible College professors, and Christian leaders have characterized the church as being: 1) At a Crossroads, 2) In Transition, 3) Facing a Crisis, 4) Being Uncertain, and 5) Experiencing Restlessness. **WHY IS THAT THE CASE? BECAUSE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE CHURCH HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY AVOIDED IN THE LAST FEW DECADES AND CONSEQUENTLY CHURCHES HAVE BECOME MORE WORLDLY THAN GODLY!**

In 1992, John Seel wrote a book entitled: “*THE EVANGELICAL FORFEIT*” in which he surveyed 25 prominent Christian leaders who expressed their views of the general state of the church as it faced the 21st Century. Eight dominant themes emerged from their responses:

- 1) An Uncertain Identity - A wide spread confusion over what defines the church.
- 2) An Institutional Disenchantment - A perception that the church is ineffective and irrelevant.
- 3) A Lack of Leadership – A sorrow over the lack of sufficient leadership with little desire to improve or develop biblical leadership in the church.
- 4) A Pessimistic Attitude – A believe that the effectiveness of the church hangs in the balance.
- 5) A “Growth-up” and “Impact Down” Condition – The reality that “mega-churches” are growing but are having very little impact for the Gospel.
- 6) A Cultural Isolation – The “Post-Christian” era has arrived.
- 7) A Humanistic Response – The lack of a biblical world view to solve the spiritual issues of the day.
- 8) A Shift from TRUTH-ORIENTED to MARKET-RESPONSE ministry – That is, a redirection from preoccupation with the ETERNAL to concern for the TEMPORAL in an effort to be viewed as relevant.

REMEMBER THESE VIEWS WERE DEVELOPED IN 1992 – 20 YEARS AGO! WHAT WOULD THEY BE TODAY? NO DOUBT 20 TIMES WORSE! WHY? BECAUSE THE PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURE REGARDING WHAT A CHURCH SHOULD BE HAVE BEEN ERASED FROM THE MIND OF MANY CHURCH LEADERS IN OUR CONTEMPORARY TIME. HOW SAD! AS COMMITTED CHRISTIANS, WE MUST BE CERTAIN TO FOLLOW THE BIBLICAL MANDATE OF WHAT THE CHURCH IS TO BE, LEST WE ALLOW THE CHURCH TO FALL INTO HERESY, WHICH WILL RESULT IN THE JUDGMENT OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! Note Revelation 2:4,5.

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I. THE DECISION OF THE CHURCH

THE LEADERSHIP OF EVERY LOCAL CHURCH MUST MAKE ONE OF TWO DECISIONS REGARDING WHERE THAT CHURCH IS GOING TO GO.

A. THE FIRST OPTION: A Church that is characteristically Need Based, Man-Centered, Consumer-Driven and Culturally Defined.

1. Churches that choose this direction will base their ministry on the current trends in psychology and sociology instead of scriptural principles.
2. Examples of such action:
 - a. Replacing biblical exposition and preaching with drama, story-telling, book reports and entertainment.
 - b. Replacing true divine worship with self-centered emotional actions.

- c. Replacing Holy Spirit led evangelism with social gospel programs.
 - d. Replacing God-honoring music with carnal, sensual sounds.
 - e. Replacing the KJV with unsound translations.
 - f. Replacing Biblical methods and messages with secular approaches to ministry.
- B. THE SECOND OPTION: A Church that is characteristically Redemptively Centered, God-Focused, Biblically Defined, and Scripturally Prioritized.
- 1. Churches that choose this direction will base their ministry on the TOTAL SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE as the COMPLETE REVELATION OF GOD TO MANKIND, and will take every measure to apply the Bible to every aspect of its operation. Churches that follow this option will look to the scriptures and address the challenges of the day according to BIBLICAL MANDATES ONLY!
 - 2. Examples of such action:
 - a. The exposition of the Word of God will be the primary ministry of the pulpit.
 - b. The worship services will not be based on human emotions but rather the continued response to the greatness of God.
 - c. The ministry of evangelism, through the pure presentation of the Word of God will be practiced.
 - d. The music will fulfill the biblical role of music which is to praise God, worship God, and teach doctrine.
 - e. The inaccurate translations of scripture will be avoided.
 - f. The methods and messages will be tested by the scripture.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone has said, “NO TIME IN CHURCH HISTORY HAS MORE CLOSELY APPROXIMATED THE FIRST-CENTURY BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH THAN NOW. OUR ANCIENT BRETHREN FACED A PAGAN, PRE-CHRISTIAN, AND PRE-MODERN CULTURE. SIMILARLY, THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH ENCOUNTERS A PAGAN, POST-CHRISTIAN, AND POST-MODERN WORLD. THE ESSENTIAL BIBLICAL MODEL OF CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE FIRSTS CENTURY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE APPROPRIATE THAN IT IS TODAY!”

QUESTION: HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF CHURCH MINISTRY? STUDY THE BIBLE AND BRING EVERY ASPECT OF THE CHURCH INTO COMPLIANCE OF SCRIPTURE!

APPLICATION: Study Acts and the Epistles!

II. THE DIRECTION OF THE CHURCH

IT WOULD STAND TO REASON THAT AFTER TWO THOUSDAND YEARS OF EXISTENCE, THE CHURCH SHOULD KNOW HOW TO FUNCTION AS GOD INTENDS. BUT THE OPPOSITE SEEMS TO BE TRUE. TOO MANY CHURCHES ARE GOING THE WRONG DIRECTION THESE DAYS!

A. Rather than many churches impacting modern culture, modern culture is impacting many churches...WHICH IS THE WRONG DIRECTION TO GO! (Note 1 Peter 2:9). Some Examples:

- 1. The impact of dress.
- 2. The impact of the Lord's Day.

3. The impact of immorality.
 4. The impact of materialism.
 5. The impact of investments.
- B. Rather than many Churches being committed to the authority of the scripture, many Churches hold a very weak and careless view of inspiration...WHICH IS THE WRONG DIRECTION TO GO! (Note 2 Timothy 3:16,17). Some Examples:
1. The lack of Bible Study
 2. The lack of searching the scripture in decision making.
 3. The lack of interest in sound preaching.
- C. Rather than many Churches affirming the truth of scripture and absolute principles for living, many churches are more interested in personal opinion and adopting the principles of the world...WHICH IS THE WRONG DIRECTION TO GO! (Note Colossians 2:8) Some Examples:
1. The lack of evangelism.
 2. The lack of missions involvement.
 3. The lack of commitment to "SOLA SCRIPTURA."
- D. Rather than many churches being interested in doctrine and theology, many churches are going the way of false teaching and devilish trends...WHICH IS THE WRONG DIRECTION TO GO! (Note: Jude 3) Some Examples:
1. The shift from God to self as the central focus of faith.
 2. The change from Bible exposition to psychological preaching.
 3. The erosion of conviction to almost anything goes.
 4. The acceptance of adverse sinful culture rather than the call for holy living.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone has said, "PASTORS AND THEOLOGIAN CAN LEARN FROM THE MAINLINE EXPERIENCE OF PLACING RELAVANCE ABOUT TRUTH. WE MUST AVOID THE LURE OF NOVELTY AND SOFT SELL, WHICH, WE ARE TOLD, WILL MAKE IT EASIER FOR MODERNS TO BELIEVE. METHODS MAY CHANGE, BUT NEVER THE MESSAGE. WE ARE CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF A GREAT AND RELIABLE THROLOGICAL HERITAGE. WE HAVE TRUTHS TO AFFIRM AND ERRORS TO AVOID. WE MUST NOT TRY TO MAKE THESE TRUTHS MORE APPEALING OR USER FRIENDLY BY WATERING THEM DOWN. WE MUST GUARD AGAINST A TRENDY "THEOLOGICAL BUNGEE-JUMPING" THAT MERELY ENTERTAINS THE WATCHING CROWD." - A Methodist Pastor

APPLICATION: The true church will make certain that it follows the direction of the Word of God and nothing else.

III. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH

MANY CHURCHES ARE ON A COURSE OF DESTRUCTION BECAUSE THEY HAVE LOST THEIR BIBLICAL IDENTITY AND HAVE DEVELOPED A MORE SOCIAL ASPECT OF MINISTRY.

NOTE: A study of seminary professors and pastors conducted by *THE ATLANTIC* magazine found the following:

- A. That Churches must be Sensitive to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality and not drive others up the wall with their personal convictions. DOING SO WOULD BE FALSE TEACHING AS IT WOULD DENY SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES AND SUPPORT A ONE WORLD, UNI-SEX SOCIETY! Churches that are true to the Word of God will stand firm on convictions without compromise.
- B. That Churches must reflect the mercy and goodness of God and not so much of His judgment. DOING SO WOULD BE FALSE TEACHING AS IT WOULD PRESENT AN UNBALANCED VIEW OF THE REALITY OF GOD.
- C. That Churches must emphasize the “goodness” of mankind, rather than the “sinfulness” of the human race. DOING SO WOULD BE FALSE TEACHING AS THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT WE ARE ALL SINNERS.
- D. That Churches must offer only what people want, not just what the Bible teaches. DOING SO WOULD BE FALSE TEACHING AS IT WOULD CREATE A “MAN-PLEASING” RELIGION RATHER THAN A “GOD-PLEASING” FAITH.

ILLUSTRATION: MANY SEMINARIES TODAY ARE TURNING OUT PASTORS WHO SUPPORT THESE POINTS THAT WILL LEAD TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE CHURCH. MANY MODERN PREACHERS DO NOT REALLY SEE HOW A BOOK WRITTEN OVER 2000 YEARS AGO CAN HAVE ANY AUTHORITY OR RELEVANCE TODAY.

APPLICATION: If the above principles are adopted by any church, it will soon be destroyed as an ambassador for Christ in the world.

IV. THE DEATH OF THE CHURCH

MANY LOCAL CHURCHES HAVE DIED AND MANY MORE MAY DIE BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT FOLLOWING THE TRUTH OF THE WORD OF GOD. IN FACT, ONE WHO OBSERVES CHURCHES AROUND THE WORLD WILL FIND A LOT OF THE FOLLOWING:

- A. There is an over-emphasis on man’s reasoning and an under-emphasis on God’s revelation of scripture.
- B. There is an over-emphasis on human need as defined by man and an under-emphasis on God’s definition of man’s need.
- C. There is an over-emphasis on earthly relevance and an under-emphasis on the eternal relevance.
- D. There is an over-emphasis on contemporary culture and an under-emphasis on the Bible.

ILLUSTRATION: Someone once said, “MANY CHURCHES INCREASINGLY SUBSTITUTE HUMAN POWER FOR GOD’S POWER, CONFUSE EMOTION WITH WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH, AND FOLLOW THE CLEVERNESS OF MAN’S WORDS RATHER THAN THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL.”

APPLICATION: Churches that follow the above pattern will replace true biblical Christianity with an impotent, idolatrous religion that will bring disgrace to the name of the Lord.

LESSONS TO LEARN:

Many churches have dishonored God by doing away with the pure teaching of scripture and adopted the philosophies of mankind. The church is not a human institution to be conducted by human ideas. The church is an institution of God to be conducted by God's principles. Each church that follows the principles of God in today's society, will STILL BE THE CHURCH God desires.