

# **Perversions of a Biblical Church**

## *Institutionalism*

### **I) Introduction**

#### **A) My Journey:**

- 1. I was raised as a Pastor's son in traditional church.**
  - Church was my life.
- 2) 1989 Dad died.**
  - Instead of a loving Caring community we were given 30 days to get out of the house.
- 3) Started attending a church in Indiana.**
  - Had great fellowship with the pastor at first, and eventually began to feel at home.
- 4) Went off to seminary at IWU.**
  - Became frustrated as a realized that here I was being taught how to do church ministry in a class room at a university surrounded by lost, hurting people.
  - IWU is one of the largest Christian universities in Indiana and yet Marion has one of the worst drug problems in the state. What effect was it making?
- 5) Graduated and became an associate pastor in my home church.**
  - 4 years ago it dawned on me that in all of my "ministry" work at the church, I could count on one hand the number of people I had personally lead to Christ.
  - Spent hours in the Sr. Pastor's office, racking our brain about how we could keep people attracted to the church long enough to become members and then how to keep the members satisfied enough so that they wouldn't go somewhere else.
  - The thought of reaching the lost did two things: 1. Made me feel guilty because I wasn't doing it. 2. Made me feel overwhelmed because I didn't know when I would have time to do it.
- 6) On the verge of burn-out I heard the statement:**
  - *"Most American pastors have stopped being fishers of men, and have merely become keepers of the aquarium."*
  - It was then that God began to call me back to biblical ministry.
- 7) Took the assistant pastor position in NC where I began to take an honest look at the effectiveness of traditional church.**

#### **B) Here is what I found:**

### **1) When God birthed the church:**

- † Roman Empire was pagan, wicked, and perverse.
- † 300 years of the church as God designed it –
- † 312 Christianity became the official religion of Rome.

### **2. God birthed our nation as a Christian nation.**

- ❖ 300 years of institutional Christianity
- ❖ America is a pagan nation.

### **3. Today:**

- ❖ At least 1950 Christian radio stations
- ❖ 88 Christian TV Networks
- ❖ 150 million professing Christians
- ❖ around 400,000 churches
- ❖ More Christian schools and universities than any other country

### ***AND YET:***

- ❖ America is the only nation in the world where Christianity is not growing.
- ❖ The largest church in the world is in Seoul Korea – The Largest Buddhist temple is in Boulder Colorado.
- ❖ The 2<sup>nd</sup> largest church is the Muslim nation of Nigeria – the largest Muslim training center is in Brooklyn New York.
- ❖ We lead the world in every category of violent crime.
- ❖ America is the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest un-churched nation in the world. (Only China and India have more lost people)
- ❖ 50% of all congregations in the US are either plateauing or declining.
- ❖ The church in China is growing by around 20,000 converts a year.

## **What is the Problem?**

**I believe there is a severe discrepancy between the Church God designed and the existing structure passing itself off as God's church.**

*Acts 4:32-35 NKJV Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. (33) And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. (34) Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, (35) and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

***How does the American church differ from the early church?***

## II) We are Institutional – they were Interpersonal.

### A) Relationships were the key focus in bringing people to Christ.

1. The word “house” or “*oikos*” in the Greek was used to refer to a person’s circle of influence not just family.
  - a) The *oikos* is the basic building block of every society.
  - b) Every person has several “*oikoses*” in their life.
    - i) home, school, work, church.
2. The early church multiplied within these “*oikoses*.”
  - a) *Acts 5: 42* “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.
  - b) *Acts 8:3* tells us that when Saul was persecuting the church, he went “*from house to house.*”
3. Jesus taught them this pattern:
  - ❖ The gospels tell of Jesus eating and fellowshiping in at least 10 different houses, among which were sinners, tax collectors, city rulers, priests, and common workers.
  - ❖ Ed Silvano – “*The church was not conceived inside a religious building; rather, it started in the upper room of a private home.*”
  - ❖ They still went to the synagogue, but the bulk of church activity took place in each other’s homes.
  - ❖ *Acts 2:41-47 NKJV* Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (42) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (44) Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, (45) and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (46) So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.
4. They were daily involved in each other’s lives.
  - Met house to house.
  - Encouraged each other.
  - Met each other’s needs.
  - Kept each other accountable.

## B) \*Other changes that took place after Constantine embraced Christianity and made the church an institution:

- ✧ The Lord's Supper changed from a **common meal** to a **ceremony**.
- ✧ Worship changed from **participation** to **observation**.
- ✧ Witness changed from **relationship** to **salesmanship**.
- ✧ Ministry changed from **personal** to almost exclusively **social**.
- ✧ Leadership changed from **gifted and called** servants to **professionals**.
- ✧ Growth changed from **multiplication** to **addition**.
- ✧ Missions changed from **being missionaries** to **supporting missionaries**.
- ✧ Confession changed from **public** before a small group to **private** in the confessional.
- ✧ Discipleship changed from **on the job** to **classroom** training.
- ✧ Fellowship changed from **in-depth, in-community** living to **more surface in large** meetings.
- ✧ Body life changed from **lifestyle** to **membership**.
- ✧ Gifts changed from **edification** to **entertainment or extinction**.
- ✧ Empowerment changed from **God's power** to **man's ability**.
- ✧ Buildings changed from **functional** to **sacred** meeting places.
- ✧ Membership changed from **producer** to **consumer**.
- ✧ Child care changed from **parental** to **church** responsibility.
- ✧ Bible study changed from **doers** of the Word to **hearers** of the Word.
- ✧ Evangelism changed from “**go structures**” to “**come structures**.”

\*taken from *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Reformation*, by William Beckham

## C) **The Church Today is Program based - The Early Church was People based.**

1. **The church today relies on Programs to draw people to the church building.**
2. **WBGL: Church of the week.**
  - ❖ Every week the pastor of a church tries to make his church attractive by telling everyone what they offer. The mentality seems to be “Come to us!”
  - ❖ Ralph Neighbor – *“I was taught by my denomination that the Sunday School was our ‘knight in shining armor,’ by which traditional churches would win America to Christ. Yet, when I examined the ten largest Sunday Schools in Texas – all with over*

*2,000 enrolled – I was stunned to discover they averaged fewer than eight adult unbelievers in actual attendance! Who was kidding whom?*

*Where did we come up with the idea that unconverted people are burning with desire to get all dressed up on Sunday morning instead of sleeping in, bursting with enthusiasm to drive to a church facility, and filled with an insatiable thirst for bible study?...I came to a conclusion. I now knew why churches didn't grow. Traditional churches were insulated islands of Christians, who didn't try to relate to the totally unchurched in the community."*

3. Human church growth strategy teaches that we must have a "hook" to get people in the church door. The only "hook" the early church had was to lift up Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **III) Conclusion**

#### **What do we do?**

- I don't know.
- I do know however that to see corruption and continue to do what is wrong because it is too difficult to do what is right is to become a part of the corruption.

#### **Where do we begin?**

- We begin by asking God to change our way of thinking to His way of thinking.
- We begin by being willing for Him to reshape us.

#### **Application Prayer:**

*Father, You have redeemed me and adopted me into the Body of Christ. Correct any unbiblical ideas or thoughts I may have and align my thinking to Your thinking. Don't let me be satisfied with anything less than what You want. Use me in Your kingdom and Your church in the way You desire to use me. Restore Your church in this place and begin that restoration with me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*