

12 Essentials of an Authentic New Testament Church

“Be sure that you make everything according to the pattern that I have shown you here on the mountain” (Exod. 25:40, NLT).

Repeatedly and emphatically in the 25th chapter of Exodus, God makes it clear to the master architect Moses that He means business about building according to the pattern. If we want God’s results, then we must do it God’s way!

Years ago my wife and I hired a handyman to install a shower in our basement. After weeks and weeks of delays, he finally finished the job but soon thereafter major problems ensued.

To the inexperienced, it might not seem like a big deal but when the worker did the construction, he did not use what was essential – waterproof drywall! Result: A couple thousand dollars of damage and the need to do it all over again.

Studying the New Testament epistles of Paul the master builder, it’s obvious God gave him specific direction for planting local churches that would be strong and remain healthy. He told the Corinthians that workers need to “build with gold, silver and precious stone, not wood, hay and stubble” because the day would come when the work would come under the scrutiny of God for reward or lack thereof (1 Cor. 3:12-13).

Anticipating a hopeful conclusion to the COVID pandemic, we are being called by God to take stock of what has happened during the turbulent time to see what changes He called for and which ones we put into place for the church to have maximum impact today. Two years ago, the following commentary challenged multitudes. Have we responded?

Post-Pandemic: Biblical or Cultural?

I submit to you that God is calling us to “repent” so “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord... Jesus Christ whom the heavens must receive until the time of restoring what God spoke through all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21). He’s graciously poking at the church for whom His Son died to align with His Word, get on track for greater impact and ultimately fulfill His promise of the harvest at the end of the age (-40).

Let’s say “sayonara” to compromise and churches offering nothing more than quick “in-and-out-burger,” non-offensive, entertaining services based more on performance than experiencing the presence of God. The same for sermonettes maintaining Christianettes that are focused on creature comforts rather than Christ-centered, character-building content. These must be let go like the sentimental handshake.

Also, no more “hot tub religion” avoiding sacrifice, suffering and sanctification! Let’s end accommodating church growth “experts” telling us about the 22-minute attention span of millennials. Let’s ditch cowardly “woke” pastors advising we not emphasize holy living or risk alienating anyone with LGBTQ references, mentioning abortion, living together or anything “political,” let alone daring to pray publicly for our president and political leaders (as Scripture commands in 1 Timothy 2:1-3).

In the post-pandemic era, may we move on boldly with radical followers of Jesus in a local church aligned fully with Scripture. May the following 12 questions help us:

1. Is Jesus Christ exalted as the Son of God, risen from the dead and humankind’s only path for forgiveness and redemption (Acts 2:22-24)?
2. Is the Bible honored and taught with authority as God’s inerrant and authoritative will for humanity (2 Tim. 3:16)?

3. Is there authenticity, sincerity and vitality in the praise and worship (Ps. 150), contrasted with lifeless liturgy or man-centered performance?
4. Is there genuine love practically expressed by the people (John 13:34 -35)?
5. Do the people build interpersonal relationships among themselves that go beyond merely attending services (Acts 2:42-47; 5:42)?
6. Do the leaders emphasize pastoral care that embraces a person's legitimate needs and do they exercise appropriate church discipline when needed (1 Pet. 5:2;)?
7. Is there an emphasis on commitment rather than mere convenience in the life of the church (Acts 2:42-47)?
8. Is there leadership present that exemplifies Christian virtue (integrity, loyalty, humility) and not merely charismatic speaking ability divorced from character (1 Tim. 3:1-13)?
9. Is there acknowledgment of and input from the five gift ministries set in the church for our maturity (apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers) (Eph.4:11-15), plus encouragement to function in our individual gift ministries?
10. Is there an evangelistic thrust to intentionally reach others with the gospel and connect with the wider body of Christ in our locality to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20)?
11. Is there a sense of reality and relevancy, as opposed to religious ritual (2 Tim. 3:5)?
12. Are people's lives being genuinely transformed through their involvement and opportunities for service (Rom. 12:1-8)?

Here's the Deal: As the waters recede and we transition into the post-pandemic era, will we rise to the challenge? May we cast down any idols, including those of religion, tradition and fear of man. "As Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it," (Eph. 5:25, MEV), may we do likewise as the bride who "made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). {eoa}

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