

7 More Dangerous Misconceptions Christians Have About the Church

Editor's Note: This is part 2 of a 2-part article. [Click here for Part 1.](#)

A key reason why people are so disenchanted with the church is simple: Their expectations of what pastors are supposed to do and how the church is supposed to function are wrong. Here a few common misconceptions:

1. The church is supposed to focus mostly on meeting my needs.

This possibly may be the most destructive belief about the local church.

People who are disenchanted about the church are usually upset that their needs haven't been met. In fact, for many it's a strange thing to hear that the church isn't mostly there for them. Instead, they are to be there for the church.

Churches should not be started in the hopes of drawing in people and simply ministering to them. But this is the extent of the vision of many church planters and pastors. Churches should be started when there's a powerful, God-given vision for advance. For example, if God speaks to a man about transformation and revival in a certain city, it might make sense to start a church and gather the laborers. Those laborers will be trained for the sake of running the specific race God has given that church.

Yes, churches should absolutely reach out to widows and orphans. They should be centers of healing. When there are needs, the church should do what it can to help (though, it can't always help in every way at all times). That being said,

those who have been trained, healed and equipped should understand the church needs them as laborers, as intercessors, as financial givers and as champions of the vision.

Most of the spiritual needs we have don't require the involvement of the pastor. We can easily grow in the Word on our own. We can seek out deliverance through others. We can learn to lean more on God than man.

If our churches were strong militaries where everyone signed up to give to the mission instead of making demands, the world would be turned upside down.

2. Relationships are the most important thing.

If there one thing that troubles me, it's when people gather together in the church to meet with friends and then lose passion when they are called to invest in the vision. I've seen this happen many times. People who want to connect relationally will stay involved until that well runs dry. Then, the pastor and leadership are accused of not having a loving church or facilitating friendships. While relationships are important, they aren't the goal. The pastor's job isn't to develop a friendship club. The mission of intercession and kingdom advance should be their focus.

I heard a story, again about IHOPKC, that speaks to this. Long ago, they instituted small groups. They started to flourish as people focused on developing relationships and satisfying that desire to make friends. That's good. However, the primary, foundational purpose of IHOPKC was compromised. The main reason the ministry was founded was to gather people to pray and worship night and day. The prayer room started to empty as the small groups grew. They put an end to the small groups. It wasn't until years later that they reinstituted them using a different model, one that ensured the small groups empowered the prayer room instead of threatening it.

This is one reason many churches today focus on small groups,

visitor assimilation, potlucks and connecting events—as the call to prayer goes silent. That’s what will fill the church and kill the very reason we are to gather in the first place: to pray. Prayer is to be the main thing in every church.

” And He taught them, and said, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves’” (Mark 11:17).

3. We should all be allowed to minister during the service.

“How is it then, brothers? When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation, and an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor. 14:26).

This is the famous verse many disgruntled people use when they share their frustrations about the church. They want to minister in the service, and they don’t like just sitting there and listening to one person teach. They attempt to spiritualize their irritation.

This argument is often a manifestation of a spirit of rejection. Their ministry has not been given a place, and they took offense. As one who has led churches for years, I don’t apologize for disallowing certain people from ministering in the service. My role is to protect the sheep. If someone desires to minister, but it’s from a wounded heart, it can do great damage. But, let’s leave that alone for a moment and deal with the crux of the matter.

Shortly after Pentecost, the early church had, as some estimate, over 10,000 Christians. There would be, of course, no way for all of them to teach a lesson or deliver a message in tongues, and then wait for an interpretation. It’s impossible.

The reality is there were two complimentary expressions of the church, the large group meeting and the small group meeting.

In the small group meeting, spiritual gifts could be exercised. A variety of people could share a message. Various songs could be sung. However, this is not the only expression of the church. In fact, I'd argue the large meeting just might be the most important. This is where God's ordained leader would gather the people and bring mature, focused instruction. In fact, the *ekklesia* best defines the large group meeting. It's a secular term that indicates a governmental gathering where leadership gives instructions to the people.

Paul did this. Peter did this. God reveals key information to pastors and leaders regarding the mission of the church, the culture, the hour and the resistance of the enemy. The pastor must then have the attention of the people so they can rightly respond.

4. We aren't supposed to be spectators.

Let's deal with this two ways. First, I believe at times we absolutely are to be spectators, meaning we sit at attention and listen carefully to the teaching. We can't diminish the value of this, as I revealed in the previous point. Second, it's true that we all have a role to play. The pastor has no obligation to allow us to minister any way we choose.

When I was a youth pastor in a large church in Texas, the pastor assigned some ministry assignments to me that I despised. My ministry was to clean all of the bathrooms between services and to spend eight hours every Friday in the scorching heat mowing the church's massive lawn. Oh yeah, I got to do some youth pastor stuff too.

I guarantee, those who are truly serious about not wanting to be spectators will have many opportunities to serve in the church! In fact, I bet if you ask your pastor where you can serve, he'll give you at least two or three options.

5. We can worship and grow in the Word alone or in small groups.

Yes, we absolutely can grow alone. In fact, we should grow alone and in small groups. As I explained above, the small group expression of the church is valuable. Additionally, we should all be students of the Word and in prayer all by ourselves. Our prayer closets can't hold more than just one of us.

However, don't forget, the purpose of the church isn't primarily to meet our personal needs, be they spiritual or natural. It's great that you can grow better on your own than by sitting in the pew on a Sunday morning. That's exactly what's supposed to happen. But, remember, the purpose of the church is to be a house of prayer for all nations. You are needed as a soldier to show up for duty. You are needed on the wall.

The church isn't there to load you up with Bible knowledge or to act as a bridge between you and intimacy with God. You can do that on your own. The church needs you to meet its needs.

6. The church isn't a building.

Somebody needs to shout this loud and clear: Stop saying the church isn't a building!

This argument is most often a passive-aggressive attempt to devalue the Sunday local church gathering. People say this to validate their decision to disengage from the local church and to just "be the church." Yeah, no. That doesn't work.

As far as I can tell, people who leave "the building" to meet in homes are still meeting in buildings. Homes are buildings. Further, buildings are really great when it's snowing or raining outside. I'm a big fan of buildings.

They may also argue that they don't want to invest money in the maintenance of a building when they can simply meet in homes instead. This argument doesn't work either. As I shared above, there must be two expressions of the church. The large

group gathering is important. What happens if the church grows beyond 50 or 100 people? Some would say to multiply out and start new home groups.

This might work at times, but very often it doesn't. We forget that God will specifically call a man or woman to lead a work. It's important that we have the opportunity to sit under that person's leadership, and that will most usually require a large venue.

When I was a part of IHOPKC, it was important for me to be in services with the entire community to hear Mike Bickle teach, share vision and give direction. It was invaluable. It required a large auditorium to do that.

7. We are all equal, and pastors shouldn't be elevated above us.

Nonsense. God absolutely favors people differently, and He calls people differently. Some are able to teach, and some aren't. Some have the gift of leadership, and others don't. We all play a part, but every single part is different.

Throughout Scripture, God called specific people to give leadership over others. Moses, Joshua, Paul and many others were put into leadership roles. Their function was not the same as others. Their maturity was not the same. Their gifting was not the same. Their anointing was not the same. None of that was equal.

Of course, God is no respecter of persons when it comes to His love, His passion for their lives and the fact that He died for them. But you'd have to be biblically blind to say He favors and positions everybody equally.

We must understand there is rank and order in God's government. God has generals, captains, privates, and, sadly, a bunch of people who have gone AWOL because they don't affirm this leadership in their lives: "Let the elders who rule well

be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. 5:17).

Final Thoughts

I'd encourage you to recalibrate your expectations of the church and of pastors with Scripture. God hasn't called us into rebellion against his precious church. We need the large and small group gatherings. God's leaders must spend their time in prayer and the Word. The church isn't mostly about feeding you, it's about equipping you as a soldier in a war. When we all get unified in prayer and mission, the church becomes both a beautiful bride and a potent weapon in the hands of God. {eoa}

John Burton *has been developing and leading ministries for over 25 years and is a sought-out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored 10 books, is a regular contributor to Charisma magazine, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. A large and growing library of audio and video teachings, articles, books and other resources can be found on his website at . John, his wife, Amy, and their five children live in Branson, Missouri.*