

Pragmatism: The Enemy of Authentic Christianity

Christians in the church today are witnessing what may be described as “truth decay.” Instead of being faithful to God’s Word, many Christian leaders take a pragmatic “whatever works and will get people to come” approach. Pragmatism has its merits, but today it is undermining authentic Christianity and our call to biblical faithfulness.

In the quest for more nickels and noses, many church leaders lean more toward political correctness, cultural relevance, image promotion and the notion that size equals success in the eyes of God.

Charismatic sideshows parade preachers of imbalanced material prosperity, self-promotion and embarrassing flashy lifestyles, which both the world and the younger generation see through as hype.

“McChurch” meetings are increasingly offered to lure more congregants with “in and out” express services featuring three upbeat songs, an offering and a 20-minute sermonette. I read of one church that advertises “Express worship, 45 minutes, guaranteed!” Some now meet on Friday so as not to interfere with people’s weekend leisure pursuits.

Pretentious and unnecessary labeling with prestigious titles is also present. Some churches hire public relations firms to gain greater visibility. I saw a recent full-page ad portraying the “new face of ministry” with such superlatives as “powerful ... seen in hundreds of millions of households ... modern ministry giant ... a ministry conglomerate like no other in the world.”

When we add to the above the plethora of divorces, scandals, unbiblical and interfaith emphases, ordination of homosexuals,

fear of man and hesitancy to speak on cultural issues (such as abortion and same-sex marriage), strange mannerisms, gaudy surroundings and rote liturgical services devoid of the power and presence of God, the time has come for the multitudes to step back in a noncritical but objective manner to do a legitimate comparison of a traditional versus biblical model of the church. Here's the deal: It's time to align with what God has ordained, no matter what the cost.

A Comparison of Traditional and Biblical Models of a Local Church

- 1. Concept of church:** An organization much like a club, or an organism—the living body of Christ?
- 2. Headship:** The people or the ascended Christ?
- 3. Authority:** A constitution or the whole Word of God?
- 4. Members:** Attenders at a weekly service, or brothers and sisters who are part of a real spiritual family?
- 5. Involvement:** Mere spectators or true participants?
- 6. Government:** Democracy or theocracy (God directly leading through the Word and the Holy Spirit)?
- 7. Leadership selection:** Recruit a professional for a job or recognize God-given, called ministers?
- 8. Basic ministry:** Preach sermons and conduct services, or glorify God by equipping people to fulfill their ministry?
- 9. Place of ministry:** Church building at stated times, or church facility, homes and in the marketplace all the time?
- 10. Primary concerns:** Attract people with whatever works, or glorify God by fully obeying His Word?
- 11. Objectives:** Buildings, bucks, bodies and breaking attendance records, or follow the biblical pattern to build up

the body and reach the world with the gospel?

12. Determining factor: What the people want, or what God declares and the people need?

13. Great Commission: Get converts (addition) or make disciples (multiplication)?

14. Purpose of assembling: Conduct services and programs, or be a dwelling place for God's presence through prayer, worship, breaking bread, applying His Word, ministering His gifts and stirring each other to love and good works?

15. Attitude while assembled: "Will I get out on time?" or "God, I've gathered with You and your people, so speak to my heart and change me to be more like You"?

16. Sermon content: Whatever makes people feel good and keep coming back, or hearing and applying the current Word from God?

17. Leadership: Highlighting a one-man ministry, or a team approach drawing upon apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers?

18. Leadership model: Minister hired to do a job, or a team of leaders (with one senior) who seek God and lead the flock as Scripture directs?

19. Church discipline: Nonexistent or an expression of God's love to safeguard His flock?

20. Deacon ministry: Subtly control the church and keep leaders in line, or handle the practical needs of the church so ministers can "give themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer"?

21. Resources: Human ingenuity, marketing techniques and available funds obtained through pleading, pressure and projection of guilt, or teaching stewardship principles and

trusting God to provide for legitimate needs?

22. Leadership: Given to anyone willing, or called, anointed, godly, faithful and proven servants?

23. Prevailing attitude: Conditional acceptance or unconditional acceptance?

24. Ultimate concern: The senior leader's reputation or insuring in all things Jesus Christ is exalted and obeyed?

25. Ultimate result: A church that has a reputation for being alive but is really dead (Rev. 3:1) or one where God is glorified, people function as He intends, the lost are saved and society is transformed by the power of the gospel incarnate in the lives of a community of people truly demonstrating that Jesus Christ is Lord?

As Jesus assessed the seven churches in the book of Revelation, how would He assess your local church? What is your assessment? What is God currently saying to you as He endeavors to awaken His church and restore it as a bride adorned for her soon-coming King?

The ways of God are becoming so clear and so simple, only the obedient will follow. Here's the deal: Will you?

Author's note: About three decades ago I had an interesting luncheon with my friend Butch Hardman in the Washington DC area. He was in a season of transition and shared with me some observations on traditional versus biblical church models. I was inspired by the material and later included it in my book Reckless Abandon. He said I could have the permission to use it and I credit Him for these insights that I have adapted for today.

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