1 Key Thing Missing From Many American Churches

From the 1960s to the early ’80s many people exited traditional and mainline denominational churches because their needs were not being met, and they were hungry for the deeper things of God. As a result, para-church organizations were raised up and played a key role in the training and discipleship of new converts. Bible schools were established to equip pastors and leaders. I was a part of that move of God.

Many of those pastors and churches that were raised up during that time, however, have now become as structured, rigid and set on their own agendas as the churches they formerly exited.

I see a trend today that is attempting to reverse this process and avoid another mass exodus from our churches by using methods and developing programs that will either keep current members from exiting our churches, or draw new people into them (that is what spurned the seeker-friendly church philosophy). Usually this is done by planning various events or offering new and exciting programs that attempt to produce a quality in the church from the outside in. And this is not the pattern of the New Testament.

The Lord gave me a word a few years ago that further magnifies this truth: *“Let the fruit grow the ministry and not the ministry grow the fruit.”* He went on to use the example of the woman at the well who had an encounter with Jesus that led to an entire Samaritan city being impacted with the gospel (John 4:28-30, 39-42). The fruit of that woman’s testimony produced greater ministry among the men of that city. The effectual working of God’s power in her heart activated her to works of service and to testify of Jesus.

It is amazing what the effectual working of the power of God does in a human heart! This power is what energizes God's people and activates the zeal of God in them. I believe the greatest miracle is when a heart is touched by God and set on fire as the woman at the well was. Revival starts with one life—one heart—radical change and—boom—a city can be touched.

So precious are those who are on fire for Jesus in this day of gross darkness. They are the hope of the church and the world. When the saints are spiritually healthy, vibrant and full of zeal it brings light and glory into a church and a city.

This is the pattern we see throughout the gospels and the New Testament. The key to this fruit in Jesus' own life and ministry lay in the revelation, power and compassion He walked in as a result of His fellowship with the Father. All fruit grows and flows from within that fellowship. True Spirit-filled fellowship and prayer is what initially makes tremendous power available (Jam. 5:16). The fruit of this power is souls being touched for God.

We cannot produce a quality in the church from the outside in as is common in the church world today when we start a ministry or a program, embalm it with some sort of structure and then try and breathe spiritual life into it that will produce fruit. The New Testament pattern is to find out where the Holy Spirit is already moving, and where spiritual life is already flowing, and follow that. Then build just enough structure to facilitate that life. That way if the operation of the Spirit of God changes or fruit is no longer forthcoming, there is so little structure established that things can easily be shut down or changed to facilitate a new way or a new flow of life.

Conversely, changing outward forms, structures, worship styles, adding a new mission statement, new technology, new programs, new outreaches, changing the name of your church or

ministry, although useful, are all false, unproductive ways to actually produce spiritual life. Spiritual life, health, and vitality flow from the fellowship we have with the Lord and of being continually baptized into the implications of who Jesus is to us.

Elaborate buildings, large numbers of people, and an increasing flow of cash is not necessarily a sign of spiritual life and vitality, nor does it guarantee the same. The church did not begin with that focus, but yet somehow modern church principles have put the emphasis on *attendance*, *buildings* and *cash*. Some have called it the ABCs of modern church growth. But many false religions of the world have a large following, magnificent buildings and lots of cash, too.

Although we are not opposed to any of these things in and of themselves, they are not the true indicators of spirituality. As a matter of fact, often these things serve as a sort of façade or smokescreen that hides the real problems and issues that are facing the church in this hour. They tend to thicken our deception and fool us into a false success.

The cart before the horse mentality would apply here. We've been guilty of painting and decorating the cart while neglecting the sick horse—the cart being the external workings of the church and the horse being the true spiritual condition of the people.

My younger biological brother who is a bit of a wordsmith came up with the following quote that illustrates the "cart before the horse" mentality that is so prevalent in the body of Christ today:

"*Another meeting, another offering, another song, another convention, another banquet, another special speaker, another concert, another project, another program … and so 'church life' continues, but the changed life remains scarce. If the horse is healthy the cart will be pulled. If the horse is*

unhealthy, making the cart more attractive is useless.” –Roy Farias

There is a subtle, almost subconscious mentality in the church today that places great emphasis on the outward and external appearances of Christianity. Think about this. We are trained by example to esteem appearance, presentation, professionalism and showmanship above what is happening internally in hearts through the effectual working of the power of God. We are easily impressed by the trappings of the production of the church and fooled by its big names and big conferences. I’m afraid there is a large gap separating the culture of the modern Western church from the heart of God as revealed through Jesus in the gospels and through the early church.

The sad truth is that in much of the church world the culture of the kingdom of God has been lost to the culture of hype, greed, religious politics, a Hollywood Jesus and the professional business of the church to such an extent that many churches resemble a political machine or a corporation more than God’s culture.

God’s culture begins with hearts being set free by the love and power of God and impacting their family and home—making disciples through life relationships, reaching and caring for others with the power of the gospel and the love of God. And because of the effectual working of the power of God in their lives no one has to tell them to do it. The true outworking of God’s power in His followers is that they become fishers of men.

In conclusion, the true disciples of Jesus are losing the taste for the shallow and superficial, and are separating themselves from those entangled in the appearance of spirituality. Many people have become disenchanted with the church because of hurt, misuse and abuse, religious politics, theological fads, celebrity lionizing, denominational

traditions and leadership caught up in the things of the flesh.

Frankly, many of them are tired of the status quo and predictable routine. People are looking for depth in the Word and in their relationships, a free flowing move of the Spirit, personal empowerment and leadership that does not play political games. We need to be less concerned about the external façades and staging of modern Christianity and focus more on the spiritual lives and condition of the people.

Is the effectual working of the power of God producing mightily in them? Are they being activated from within for works of service? Are they on fire and testifying of Jesus in their spheres of influence?

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