

10 Things Many Institutional Churches Miss

The following are my general observations to aid the church in its quest to restore New Testament patterns. (The quest for first-century apostolicity is sometimes referred to as *primitivism* or *the restoration movement*.)

I realize that the following are broad categories based on my opinion that may or may not precisely fit with each church or denomination.

1. The early church leaders did not matriculate through a formal ordination process. In the Old Testament, there is a formal ceremony depicting the placement of the priesthood (Exod. 28-29). In the New Testament, we see that the original twelve were commissioned by Jesus to serve as His apostles. A formal ceremony commissioning them is not indicated (Mark 3:13-15; Luke 6:12-13). I would assume that Jesus laid His hands upon them after they functioned for a time in their calling while walking with Him and receiving His correction and mentoring (Luke 10:17-20). We also see the elders of the church of Antioch laying their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, setting them apart for the work of apostolic ministry (Acts 13:1-2). The Pauline pattern of establishing churches also involved the laying on of hands, setting people apart for ministry (Acts 14:22-25; 1 Tim. 4:14).

In all these instances, the most important aspect of their ordination involved walking with a spiritual leader in the context of a Jesus-centered community. This organically culminated in their commissioning after they proved their calling both in practice and by a witness of the Spirit (Acts 20:28). Consequently, the current practice of matriculating clergy (through an extra local seminary, followed by an elaborate ceremony) as the prerequisite to serving as a church

overseer is not the norm of early primitivism.

2. There was no separation between clergy and laity. In the first-century church, all Christ followers participated in the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:8-9). There was no separation between the church place and workplace or the so-called clergy and laity. Also, most overseers were married and were vetted based upon their ability to manage their biological household (1 Tim. 3:1-12). As a spiritual leader, Paul was bivocational and even used a lecture hall to launch a church (Acts 18:3; 19:9).

3. The Spirit was poured out upon all flesh for ministry. On the day of Pentecost, Peter equated the Jesus movement with Joel's prophecy of the last days when the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh to release all people – male, female, young and old – to prophesy and experience visions and dreams (Acts 2:17-18). Hence, the focus was on the spontaneous empowerment by the Spirit to advance gospel proliferation (Acts 1:8-9). Today, church services are entrenched in predictable liturgy and routines that exclude all from ministry except ordained clergy. They should instead release Spirit-inspired ministry irrespective of formal training, gender or age.

4. Each successive generation of church movement should be apostolic. For the church to remain an ever-expanding missional movement, apostolically gifted leaders should serve at the helm of denominations and networks. This is the reason why Jesus chose 12 apostles and not 12 pastors to initiate His movement. Historically, many movements appoint gifted administrators as their leaders in their second generation. This bottlenecks expansion, which then results in routinization.

5. All people were to read and interpret the Scriptures. In the New Testament, the apostolic writers wrote letters to their congregations and church collectives, not just to other apostles and elders (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Hence, they expected all

believers to understand and interpret the sacred writings with the help of the Spirit and church teachings (Heb. 5:11-14; 1 John 2:20-27). Unfortunately, some historic denominations (like Roman Catholicism) discouraged the so-called laity from reading the Bible to prevent church schisms. Even some historic protestant Christians and Evangelicals often depend solely upon their pastors to study and expound the Scriptures, as if they are excluded from devotion to the Scriptures because they are not full-time ministers. This goes against the plain teachings of Scripture (Ps. 1; 1 Tim. 3:15-16).

6. We are to confess our sins to one another. Some historic churches only allow confession of sins to one's assigned priest. The New Testament encourages all believers to confess their sins to one another so they can be healed (Jas. 5:16).

7. Christianity is a way of life, not a routine. Jesus said that He was the Way (John 14:6). The early church was initially described as a way of life (Acts 5:20; 9:2; 19:23). Unfortunately, many Christians view Christianity as a religion defined merely by church attendance on Sundays and special holidays. Sadly, it has become a routine that is often not integrated into their daily life.

8. Christianity is not defined and confined to a building. The original church was persecuted and often forced to meet secretly in homes and catacombs. Now Christianity is so marginalized in a culture that people call buildings that hold Christian services "churches." Hence, the faith has been relegated to a one-hour service in a building on Sundays.

9. The office of bishop should encompass apostolicity. Today, many historic churches believe that the office of the bishop is the successor of the original apostles. Despite this, many churches pick bishops who are great administrators but who often lack the missional zeal and ability that's befitting to apostolic ministry. This limits the level of equipping grace believers need for evangelistic zeal and ministry capacity

(Eph. 4:7-12).

10. God has no grandchildren. In the New Testament, every person had to be born from above and personally receive Jesus to be a true Christian (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8). Often in institutional churches a person is born in a Christian family, baptized as an infant and grows up as a cultural Christian without personally encountering Jesus. Unfortunately for them, God has no grandchildren. He demands that every individual become His son or daughter (Rom. 8:14-16). {eoa}

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