

Church Too Occupied With Growing From Outside In Than Inside Out

The nature of the kingdom of God is that it grows from within, from the inside out and not from the outside in. It grows from the new nature we receive when we're born again by the Spirit of God. The Old Testament temple mentality was set up to control you externally through rules and regulations in contrast to being ruled from within through love and the Spirit of truth in the New Testament. Many of Jesus' parables expounded on the nature and operations of the kingdom of God, emphasizing its organic nature.

For example, He taught in the parable of the sower, noting that without understanding that parable, you cannot understand other parables (Mark 4:13). In other words, within that parable lay the key to understanding other parables. The key is not only in the incorruptible seed of the Word of God being sown, but in the soil's ability to receive that seed. The soil represents the heart of man. The true spiritual condition of any local church body or ministry depends on the health of the hearts of the people.

From 1987-1996, my wife and I were part of a team of missionaries that established interdenominational Bible training centers in West Africa. Since then, as the ministry has passed through different hands in that region, there has been a diminishing of the spiritual life and fire that were strong birthmarks early on. The real spiritual barometer that gauges the life of the work is in the hearts of the leaders and what they are imparting to the students. Currently there are efforts being put forth to restore the ministry there to its former glory. Our caution, though, must be to avoid the temptation of financing outward structures—whether they are

buildings, better office space, vehicles or equipment—without taking care of the diminishing spiritual life that caused the decline in the first place.

Again, there is a mentality out there in ministry and church life that says if we make the outward more attractive, the inward will take care of itself. If we have a nicer building, more money, better equipment and more, then God will send the fruit of revival. But the New Testament as well as history show that revivals have usually started with humble beginnings and from people whose hearts were simply hungry and thirsty for more of God. God is not pleased when we glory in the flesh and in external things and place our dependency on those things to produce fruit.

Think of how Jesus began His earthly ministry. He chose 12 men and called them to spend time with Him. Look what happened! Revival spread everywhere. Without buildings, without equipment, without fancy promotional techniques or gimmicks, without devising new programs and methods to reach people, without a lot of structure, and rules and regulations to govern them externally, they experienced constant revival.

“But that was Jesus!” you say. But aren’t we called to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), and do the works and greater works than He did (John 14:12)? Isn’t He the pattern? Isn’t that what the early church did after Jesus left the earth? Isn’t that why the Holy Spirit was sent to us?

The Lord wants us to understand that the nature of the church and of the kingdom of God is organic. The new nature and the life of God in the spirit of man is what make the church a living organism and not so much an organization. You cannot manufacture an organism or breathe life into it, whether it is a tree, a plant or the human body. Fruit cannot be manufactured. It is a by-product of being alive. Life begins and continues to grow from the inside, not the outside. That’s why we must constantly watch over our hearts, feeding and

nurturing the new nature within us, and follow the flow of the life-giving Spirit, not a dead program.

In Acts 2:47 the Lord “added to the church daily” because the early church was functioning as a living organism, drawing its life from within. The work seems to have grown and multiplied almost effortlessly without the strength of the arm of flesh or the wisdom of man. Here is a powerful truth:

Organic principles utilize a minimum amount of energy, yet produce maximum results (fruit).

“For the earth bears fruit by itself” (Mark 4:28a). By itself—I repeat—all by itself, a living organism produces fruit from the soil, which in this case represents the heart of man.

How different this is from so much of church life today. How many times have you heard pastors and church leaders try to get people to pray, witness, read their Bible, get involved in some church program or outreach, all to no avail. Or a new program is started, and there is spiritual life and fire in it for a while, but soon, it becomes burdened with layers of rules, regulations and top-heavy structure until the life that was in it dies or moves on.

Jesus did not go out among sinners because of some structured program, policy or law that told Him He had to do it. He did not spend time with sinners to earn wages from the Father. He did not pray so He could please the Father and make it to heaven. He did all these things because it was His nature. The spiritual life within Him produced these actions and their fruit.

Let's return to the simplicity of living our Christianity from the inside out. {eoa}