

How Many Churches Fall for This Legacy Myth?

Jesus told us quite clearly that He will build His church (Matt. 16:18). He did not say that He would help you build your own congregation, but that He would build the church in general.

(The difference in meaning between the two are significant and profound as related to the conceptual framework of this article.)

In the same way, He told us to pray that His kingdom would come (Luke 11:2-4), not that your particular church would come, on earth as it is in heaven. The point being this: both “the” church and the kingdom are what it is all about and that which will last forever. This may or may not include every local church, congregation or Christian institution founded by believers.

Understanding the above truth reveals the heart of those who plant churches, ministries and Christian institutions as nothing else I know!

I have observed that many attempt to use their gifts and abilities to build their own empires in the name of Jesus via planting a local church and or Christian entity—and they suffer immense psychological turmoil when people leave their church or ministry—in spite of the fact that many of the people who left who were nurtured in their ministry continue to contribute to the cause of Christ for years to come, but just not with their former pastor and or congregation. Consequently, one of the primary reasons for the psychological turmoil and sense of failure many pastors and Christian leaders feel when a person leaves their church and or their ministry closes is because we do not have a true understanding

of what and how Jesus builds His church and advances His kingdom. (Of course, Jesus can also close a church or ministry because of foolishness, pride, idolatry, immorality and false doctrine—which is not the subject of this article. See Revelation 2 and 3.)

Many of us have a twisted view of leaving a legacy because we confuse our legacy with leaving an institution and or entity that outlives us. However, Scripture teaches us that “the memory of the just is blessed” (Prov. 10:7a). When Paul the apostle, in his last epistle, was focusing on passing the baton to Timothy, he said to him “you, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience” (2 Tim. 3:10a, NIV). He said virtually the same thing to the Corinthian church when he told them that he would send Timothy to them to remind them of his way of life in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 4:17).

He told the Ephesian elders that it was the word of His grace that would build them up and give them an inheritance in the context of reminding them of his life (see Acts 20:32). My point in all this is if we were to judge Paul the apostle by the current standards of institutional legacy building, then he was a complete failure—since none of the congregations he founded remained true to their original calling and no longer exist.

As a matter of fact, every one of the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation no longer exists today, since that whole geographical region (the modern nation of Turkey) converted to Islam! In spite of all this, I think most would agree that Paul was the most effective apostle in all of Christian history, primarily because his influence continues today through churches, ministries and institutions in every corner of the globe, in places he never went and to people he never met but who are still being impacted today through his life and teachings.

It is the memory of the just that blesses, not necessarily the institutions of the just. (Especially when they fail to live up to the vision, mission and passion implicit in the genesis of their founding.) As a matter of fact, I believe that those who have the least impact on individual lives (who have no spiritual sons and daughters) intuitively attempt to build the biggest monuments to themselves (through large buildings and institutions) to ensure that they are remembered by future generations. (See the example of Absalom in 2 Sam. 18:18.) Of course, the Lord Jesus never built an institution, however, He built people through whom He built His church who built many institutions and movements the past several thousand years that have transformed billions of lives and changed every aspect of culture and civilization.

In all my years observing God's ways, I have come to the conclusion that His church will continue with or without my participation and or monuments I have built; His kingdom is larger than anything I can comprehend—and His ways and methods are inscrutable. Consequently, irrespective of whether or not the local church, ministry or institution we create lasts beyond our lifetime—our individual life, teaching and accomplishments will continue to influence and impact people either directly or indirectly for generations to come, even touching those who may have never heard our name or knew about our life and accomplishments.

At the end of the day, only Jesus knows how to build His church in a way that the gates of hell will not prevail. His church and His kingdom will continue forever—even if it is not in the way, shape and form that it is presently constructed. That being said, (of course) this article is not an excuse to build fly-by-night churches or ministries that are short-lived. I have attempted to build local churches and ministries that will continue way past my life, but even if they do not it does not mean that I was a failure—or that I totally missed God—it may merely mean that He needed another way to manifest

His kingdom through His church that our present structure, name and methodologies could not contain or express in the new realities of the future. However, anything I have built on the foundation of Christ will continue to last throughout eternity (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15).

May we all allow Jesus to build through us, because unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it! (Ps. 127.)