

Witchcraft Is Driving an Unhealthy Focus on Church Growth

A sinister spirit is behind much of today's church growth movement.

A recent post on Facebook resulted in a long stream of comments from people shouting amen, asking me to start a church, sharing heartbreak over today's church and dropping in a bunch of fire and bullseye emojis. Here's part of what I wrote: "I'm more convinced than ever that attempting to grow churches and develop programs and ministries has made it nearly impossible to see the remnant church so many are yearning for."

Pastors, please hear me. Stop the madness! Stop counting how many people show up every Sunday morning. Stop analyzing metrics. Stop setting numerical growth goals. Stop casting vision that's centered around your local church growing. Stop. For the love of everything holy, just stop.

I know, I know. The Bible tells us that the church was added to daily: "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47b).

Notice, however, the Lord added to their number, not the assimilation team or the marketing team.

In fact, if we back up in the text just a bit, we'll clearly see it wasn't marketing or a seeker-sensitive, low water-level approach that resulted in growth.

With many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about

three thousand souls were added to them (Acts 2:40-41).

Unapologetic preaching and a call to repentance were the impetus for growth. A Holy Spirit-infused message calling people out of a lifestyle of wickedness is what triggered the awakening—not assimilation strategies. The apostles had no need for church growth. They simply preached a transforming message in the power of the Holy Spirit and watched God move. Can you imagine the early apostles sitting around a table in the upper room discussing how to form greeter teams, what coffee and donuts to buy and how to attract people to their services? The thought of it feels like blasphemy! Yet, today's churches do just that every week. The fear of the Lord is nowhere to be found: "Then the churches throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and were built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

The fear of the Lord and the moving of the Holy Spirit—not programs and ministries—resulted in growth and impact.

In fact, consider this powerful truth: False prophets and false teachers are smart enough to know what will truly attract is an encounter with the supernatural—not programs and pastries: "For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24).

If false prophets are focusing on the (unholy) supernatural, why are so many pastors and leaders tied to natural ideas and gimmicks to draw in the people? It's foolishness. We need the fresh fire of the Holy Spirit to fall. We need to eliminate the distraction and undue stress of most of our church ministries and programs—and simply gather the remnant to pray.

Focus Must Shift to the Remnant Church

I absolutely believe in church growth, but I don't believe

every local church must grow numerically in order to fulfill its purpose. The stigma of small churches has haunted many a pastor. Our focus must be on the city church and regional revival as opposed to local church numeric growth. The group of people on the local level that will spur on the pursuit of revival in the city is the remnant. It's the remnant church. These are your champions of intercession, holiness and passion for Jesus. They will zealously dive deep and advance into uncharted waters.

Note that I didn't say these people are your core group or your leadership team. The remnant should be the whole of the church. Everybody going deep together. The lukewarm, apathetic people with whom so many pastors attempt to grow their churches will be alerted to their condition and then left with a decision. They will either dive into the depths with the rest of the body or they will, by their own choice, shrink back. In fact, the Bible says they will ultimately die. Pastors, why are we trying to grow our churches with the spiritually comatose?

To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

"He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars says these things: I know your works, that you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain but are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfected before God" (Rev. 3:1-2).

We need bold messages of awakening in our pulpits today! The call to holiness, prayer and revival must be continual. There must be a prophetic unction burning in the guts of pastors today. The goal is not church growth. It's obedience to Jesus and a lifestyle of intercession and fire!

When we understand that a group of 20 or 50 fiery, praying, devoted remnant believers can do more to minister to God and shake a city than a thousand mildly curious church goers, our

energy will shift from church growth to kingdom impact. Are both mutually exclusive? No. But, the risk of compromise is great when we are attracted to numbers.

The Remnant Is Done With Church as Usual

Pastors have been duped into believing they need to (witch)craft their services in such a way that the seekers will be drawn, and not overwhelmed. They manipulate the environment to attract the largest possible group.

First, as I have already explained, the church wasn't designed for the lost. The call for all is to radically and immediately surrender and turn from their wicked ways. Creating a culturally relevant atmosphere that gives people a comfortable warming up period to the concept of God is no way to run a church. The church service was never meant to be used for evangelism. It's a believers' prayer meeting, not a place to assimilate seekers.

Second, when the lost do come in, when a move of God shakes the foundation and the neighborhood bars empty and the desperate line up at the church doors, they are not looking to be pacified and affirmed. They are ready to break! They want an encounter with deity. They don't want your programs or ministry philosophies. They want Jesus!

The remnant has had enough of these low-water approaches to ministry.

Those who are desperate for a move of God don't really care that much about being greeted with a handshake and a smile at the door as they arrive on Sunday morning, yet pastors invest much energy and focus on assimilation, hospitality, visitation and other people-centric strategies. The remnant doesn't care about being assimilated. They want to burst through the door and head to the altars alongside other desperate people.

They aren't impressed by a perfectly produced and executed

worship experience led by people who haven't had an encounter with God in years—if ever.

They are not interested in the pastor's latest, greatest teaching if it's not burning with fire and dosed with anointing that can only come from hours in the prayer room.

They are bored with today's predictable, powerless, structured and forgettable church services.

The remnant simply wants to gather together with others that have the smell of fire on them and pray. They aren't looking to shake hands with others and they really could not care less about announcements, programs and special events. They want to be wrecked and rocked by the glory of God.

How far have we fallen as leaders when we think an unthreatening, casual environment would be the medicine for a spiritually apathetic people. Churches have the smell of death on them because they are attracting the dead to something devoid of resurrection power. Sometimes I wonder if there's any difference between those in the pews and those in the ground in the church cemetery next door.

A Sinister Spirit of Witchcraft is Driving Much of Today's Church-Growth Culture

My friend Jeremiah Johnson also posted this recently:

When the offerings are down ...

When attendance is low ...

When the attacks won't stop coming ...

Will you continue to preach the gospel or go back to manipulating people?

If asked why they want their church to grow, pastors will offer some spiritual answers:

- We want to win the lost.
- Anything healthy grows.
- We want to impact our neighborhood.

While those points are good, and while there are many phenomenal pastors who are doing their best to serve God with obedience, I know there are other more honest answers to the church growth question we must consider:

- If the church grows, it's evidence that people like me.
- I need the money a larger group will bring into the church.
- My reputation will take a hit if I can't grow the church.
- If the church doesn't grow, I'll have to get another job.
- I'm being pressured by my board or overseers to grow numerically.
- We can only fulfill the vision if a lot of people buy into it.
- I'll feel like a failure.
- My identity is tied to my performance in ministry.
- We have been seduced by the success of other ministries and want to have the same success.

The pressure to grow numerically is insane. Pastors are falling into depression. Recently there have been horrible headlines of pastors committing suicide. The stress of leading ministries and meeting metrics can be too heavy to bear.

The allure and demand of church growth can be seductive indeed. If the Lord isn't bringing increase (due to a failure to host the Holy Spirit and to boldly preach offensive truth), there is another spirit that is more than willing to extend a wretched, crooked hand. A demonic, wicked spirit of witchcraft thrives on control and manipulation. This spirit rebels against the methods of the kingdom and against the purity of the Holy Spirit with tactics that will minister to the

leader's need for success.

Please understand me. I'm not saying all focuses on numeric growth are impure. I'm really not. It's possible to possess an apostolic and prophetic spirit and to see through the eyes of God into a future of impact and explosive growth. It's possible to discern a coming harvest. It's possible to have the heart of an evangelist and to cry out for the lost and for a church filled with new, Spirit-filled, hungry converts. It absolutely is. In fact, a passion for the harvest, a cry for souls, must radiate out of every pastor and leader. Sadly, however, the allure of church growth is rarely born from such a pure desire.

Instead, an evil spirit is invoked, rarely deliberately, usually by default as an impure passion of the heart that demands satisfaction. Pastors' souls are sold for the promise of a full house—a promise that is rarely delivered on. Further depression and failure is usually the result. Sometimes the church does explode, but not with burning zealots. Instead it's a morgue, filled with people who are numb, cold and without signs of life.

The remnant church is wising up. While I have and always will teach that we must honor pastors and refuse to move in rebellion to God's established authority, a disturbing shift must come to the church, and fast.

Pastors, we must stop using people to build our own kingdoms.

The witchcraft necessary to coerce people to give financially, to serve the pastor's vision and to build a ministry for impure reasons is extreme. It truly requires quite a few very powerful demons to anoint such a venture.

Please understand, I'm not talking about pastors who are intentionally evil and manipulative. I'm talking about pastors who have heart issues, those who try to spiritualize their ventures, those who are attempting to grow their church just

like most every other pastor they know, those who have been seduced but don't know it. They need to be shocked out of their deception and into the rest and peace that comes from allowing the Lord to bring the increase instead.

The Church We Are Yearning For

Someone asked how I'd like to see church services go. Here's what I said:

Start with an hour of fiery intercession in the sanctuary prior to the service. Let it keep going as people show up for the service. Let the musicians play behind the prayer for the first 30 minutes or so of the service. Then, as prayer continues, let the musicians kick into some prophetic worship for a song or two. Open up the mic for decrees and declarations. Have the dancers and flaggers and others fill the altars. Encourage people to pace around the room or hit their face and contend. After a couple of hours or so, there might be a strong prophetic message, or just some declarations of the Word. Then flood the altars as people lead in prayers of repentance and reveal prophetic revelation that was received during the service.

Of course, that's one model, but the point I'm making is that the coming remnant church simply isn't interested in most of what is offered today—at all.

Pastors, when we realize the church service was never meant for assimilating seekers or evangelizing the lost, the stress of church growth falls off. The pressure to grow numerically can be replaced by the joy and passion of ministering to God.

Again, yes, we most definitely can believe God for numerical growth—if that's God's desire for our particular local expression of the church. And, also, there are those who will overspiritualize their small congregation. They argue that their focus on holiness and revival doesn't allow for

numerical growth. Ridiculous. Remember, where the fear of the Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit and bold preaching exist, people will respond. Many will mock. Many will marvel. The city will be impacted. The local church may or may not grow numerically, but it will in spiritual depth, and the church in the city will be impacted. {eo}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.