



BANNER of *Love* MINISTRIES

The Church Works

I love the church. I know, already, I have lost half of you. In these days of organic, hipster, fad-driven Christianity the church is not in vogue. In fact, everywhere I turn, I seem to hear believers tearing down the body of Christ. Like disembodied souls, these folks float from body to body telling us, “You know what’s wrong with the church...?” Sure the talk all sounds good: organic community, church without walls, the church needs to “leave the building” and “be the church” to the community around us, etc. To avoid the rabbit hole of chasing each one of these complaints, I will draw out a common theme from among them. Everyone is trying to find the problem with the church, leading to a lot of “reinventing the wheel.” Maybe, if we stop approaching the church from the assumption that something is wrong with it, and start looking at our own perceptions we are asserting on the church, maybe we’ll realize the church isn’t broken at all.

What’s Wrong With the Church?

If it’s not broken, why fix it? Yet, many are trying to fix the church. If anything with the church is broken, it’s because man tried to fix it in the first place. When something is instituted by God, what right do we have to pick it apart?

“On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?” Romans 9:20

The church was given to us by Christ himself, of which He is the head. (Ephesians 1:23)

Individualism, and the Erosion of the Selfless Body of Christ

The problem with the church, in fact, is not a problem with the church. The fault lies on our end.

“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.” 2 Timothy 4:2

As prophesied to Timothy by the apostle Paul, we have accumulated for ourselves teachers, churches, and entire movements to serve us in what we want to hear. You may ask, what is it we want to hear about? Easily, I can say we want to hear about ourselves. The emphasis is on, “*what God and the church can do for me*” instead of “*what can I do for God and the church?*” This has created a seeker-sensitive global church in

which leaders of the flock are intimidated to speak the truth in love. Therefore, anyone who does speak the truth is branded a legalist, bible-basher.

The truth is hard! It is a standard and measure of how we've come up short. It's personal, and folks don't want to get personal. People want to be generic and safe. Personal means God sees us. Deep down we know we have fallen short, we have sin and rebellion, and that's what most people don't want to deal with it. This causes them to distance themselves from God and any authority who will call these things out in their lives. Instead, they surround themselves with "leaders" who will serve them in what they want to hear.

The Problem with Authority — The Fatherless, Orphan Heart

"But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." Philippians 2:19-22

I am blessed to have a really good spiritual father who isn't afraid to "tell it like it is." Not that I received it so well in the past. See, I had authority issues. I didn't trust anyone to look into my life, see my failures and shortcomings, and — God forbid — call me out on them. Some would say I kicked and screamed when I received adoption from my spiritual dad. Due to my past experiences, the only reason I believed someone would "call you out" was to bring shame or condemnation. I had no idea how deeply healing it could be when it was done out of a bottomless heart of love. A specific situation comes to mind when my pastor came over one Saturday morning (during his own personal family time) to bring correction to us on a situation. He came to tell my husband and I what we *weren't* gifted at. Yes, you heard me right. We were gutted. The truth hurts, but THANK GOD I didn't respond out of my own past hurt and shut down. By the Holy Spirit, I caught a glimpse of something (though not at all mastering it in that time).

It was harder for him, than it was for us. He took his own time to go out of his way to tell us the awkward truth, NOT because he was a sadist, but because he deeply loved us! Our pastor saw our potential, and didn't want us wasting our calling on something that wasn't for us. Not to mention, he spared us embarrassment and years of wasted time. Now, I use this example to paint the picture of a loving, Christlike authority who embodies the purpose of the church. Without submitting ourselves to the loving voice of truth from the church, we will ultimately be shipwrecked in the faith and our destiny in God.

"This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." 1 Timothy 1:18-19

True, God-given leadership longs to protect the church from harm, warn them of pitfalls, and guide them on straight paths.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Philippians 1:9-11

Leading by example, they set a high bar in our lives that is not unfair or unreachable, but is set for our good. Out of love, the Body should be continually burdened to see its members overcoming in the call of God. Because it *is* personal. The corporate heart of the church should break for those who are under-coming, fearing they could become entirely lost.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” Philippians 3:17

Unfortunately, this new church age of “independence” has not brought freedom, but bondage to sin. Spiritual-vernacular-spewing flesh and selfishness run rampant. Instead of a spirit of adoption, believers are making spiritual orphans of themselves. Many have left the faith entirely.

This is not a word brought to condemn believers, but a loving rebuke to repent and turn back to your selfless devotion to Christ. Let’s stop looking to the church only to serve “me”, and instead learn what there is to be gained in laying our lives down for the Body of Christ.

“But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.” Hebrews 10:32-34

There is no “I” in “Team”

I grew up in the church. My father was the pastor. I was always in church, and I always knew God. But, when I *really* came to *know* God, and was filled with the Holy Spirit, I couldn’t get enough. I wanted to be in church all the time! I had an insatiable hunger for more of God. I wanted more of His Word, more corporate worship, and more fellowship and “family time” with my new brothers and sisters in God my Father. For the first time, I felt full and I wanted everyone around me to receive that fullness. Naturally, I found myself sacrificing all I had into the lives of others in the body.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 1:3-8

Serving the Body is the natural overflow of having truly received Christ. We are not called to simply lay down our own lives to receive Christ. We are to lay our lives down for one another — the body of Christ, the church — to see *them* built up. This was the example of

Christ, this was the example of Paul, this should be the example of any *true* apostle, and this should be the example of every Christian believer.

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.” Philipians 2:14-18

Let's Get in the Game

If the body is lacking anything, it is lacking YOU — your life, your self-sacrifice. The church is only a complete body when every part is working together (1 Corinthians 12), strengthening each other, and functioning in love as it is designed by the Father. Only when we are together are we truly sheltered and safe from attack, encouraged in hardship, and strengthened to grow up into the likeness of God the Father.

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:14-16

So I implore you from the heart of the Father,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:23-25

When the Church Hurts

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it...” 1 Corinthians 12:26

Sometimes we're hurt. Pain can be crippling, causing us to be disabled in the purpose God has for us. In the midst of pain and grieving we can often misplace our blame. When going through difficulties in relationships with fellow believers, we need to be careful not to place blame on God, His church body, His leaders, or His children. The enemy would love for us to find fault with the very things that God has given us to heal, thus isolating us and eventually bringing spiritual death. When we find ourselves hurting, it's important not to pull away from the church. You are hurting without the church, and the church is hurting without you. By pulling away we cause ourselves damage in about the same way as a plant cutting off its own roots. But it is also important to remember that, in pulling away, we do damage to the church — Christ's own body.

As believers we are called to forgive. If forgiveness doesn't work in the church, it won't work anywhere. It is our job as believers to be practiced in forgiving other's debts against us.

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.” Mark 11:25-26

Harboring unforgiveness will only block your relationship with the Father, and pulling away from the church will cut your lifeline to being restored to Christ. Forgive quickly, and seek healing from *within* God’s family. Remember, issues are never one-sided (Matthew 7:3-5). It takes humility to repent, but this is the road to restoration.

“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed.” James 5:16

And remember, you are responsible for you. The other party is responsible for themselves. You do what is right before God and your church leadership, and the rest is up to them.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Romans 12:18