



Is the Contemporary Church what it Should Be?

by Dan Schaffer

In the last newsletter we looked at God's pattern for **judgment** and **restoration** for nations and institutions. In this newsletter we want to take specific look at the American church and ask the question... Is the church institution under the law?

What are the primary characteristics of the church when it is living its' mission? Let us begin by looking at the focus of the church following Pentecost. They were focused on the Apostle's teaching and prayer. Fellowship, time spent together, and worship characterized their relationships. Awe and thankfulness characterized their response and attitude. The power and presence of God was evident and permeated everything that they did. The orientation and highest value was on spiritual things and not on material possessions. The people of the culture were drawn to them and they were reproducing a multitude of disciples of the Way, and of Christ. This church was living out the primary mission of God's Church... to bring God's people into the image of Christ and maturity, so they could accomplish God's calling of reproducing fully "mature and reproductive" disciples.

Let us contrast that picture of the alive and effective 1st century church with the contemporary American church. Many are focused on butts in the seats and bucks in the offering plates. They are attracting consumers who expect their personal needs to be met at an ever increasing level, or they will take their business else ware. Our highest value is placed on remaining economically and institutionally viable. We are characterized by apathy, consumerism and political correctness. Our influence in and on the culture is significantly deteriorating. We experience little of the power and presence of God! And we are reproducing few mature, effective and reproducing disciples.

In the second chapter of the book of Revelation we are given the unique opportunity of hearing Christ give His evaluation of seven churches in Asia Minor. This evaluation was given near the end of the first century and gives the clearest indication of how God views these churches that are offspring of the Jerusalem church. The focus and emphasis in the second paragraph of this newsletter states how He gives specific evaluation of six churches in Asia. The first thing that seems very clear is that Jesus differentiates between each of these churches and the church universal that is made up of all true believers. It seems clear that he is referring to the institution and community of each church. In fact in the case of the church of Thyatira, He differentiates between those who have been deceived by the woman Jezebel, and those who do not hold to the "deep secrets" but hold to the truth of basic Christianity. It is clear that the institution of the church, in that location, would be judged along with the individuals that strayed from the truth. But those who remained true to the truth would not be judged. It seems clear to me that we as individual Christians, are under grace but the bureaucracy of the church as an institution, is under the law!

Let us take a look at the church at Ephesus. He gives them high marks when it comes to performance... they are "doing" everything right! But their focus is wrong! Where they started looking to Christ, they later moved to focusing on doing right things instead of following Christ. What makes me take note is the fact that there hasn't been a Christian church in Ephesus for a thousand years. They didn't return to and stay centered on Christ, and their candle was taken out of the lamp stand and their light no longer shown.

It seems clear to me that the institutions of the churches in Revelation are under the law and if they turn away they will be judged. What about the Church in America? Is the church under the law and at risk of judgment?

This is a list of the **grievances** that Christ had against the church:

- 1. Lost their focus on and love of Christ.** When we focus on seekers and consumers... instead of growing in relationship with Christ until we reach maturity are we falling into this trap?
- 2. Living in and encouraging sexual sin.** When we justify and even encourage what God has clearly identified as sin, such as adultery and homosexuality, aren't we acting the same way? Doesn't our dress and interactions show our lack of concern in this area?
- 3. Participating in Idol worship.** When we elevate anything, even the gifts of the spirit or good works above knowing and worshipping Christ... are we setting up an Idol?
- 4. Raising up special knowledge and "deep secrets" above the basic truths of the faith.** When our method of doing church is more important than the Gospel... are we are living our faith?
- 5. Thinking they were spiritually alive when they are spiritually dead.** When the spiritually alive try to reproduce without reproduction... do we really show that we are dead?
- 6. Neither hot nor cold but lukewarm.** Apathy characterizes much of the North American Church... we are lukewarm. Where is our passion for God?

Looking at Christ's evaluation, does this sound like many of the Churches in the USA are in danger of judgment? Are we already experiencing God's judgment? We must remember God's judgment is restorative and not punitive! But is experienced as punitive, when we ignore the call and experience more and progressively severe calls to respond and turn back to God. What should our response be?



Building Brothers International Travel Journal

by Dan Schaffer

This is an e-mail that I sent to update on my travels to Brussels and Ghana. I thought you might enjoy catching a sense of these trips as God guided me and the men involved!

In February I traveled to **Brussels, Belgium**. I introduced Phase one of the Building Brothers process to 18 men and 13 of them committed to enter the year long process on Saturday Feb 21. On Sunday I preached first to an English speaking congregation and challenged them to leave a legacy by becoming a man who knows God intimately and is giving life to everyone he meets, a Spiritual Father. Almost every man in the congregation responded to the invitation and came to the altar. Then in the evening in the French speaking congregation 18 men responded and said that they wanted to become men who were life givers. The majority were young men between the age of 20 and 30 years old.

I was home for 10 days and then headed for **Ghana, Africa** on March 6. I arrived on the evening of March 7. On Saturday March 8 I met with a number of pastors and introduced the focus of Building Brothers.

Wednesday I finished training about twenty pastors in a port city called Tema that is adjacent to Accra. The men were very motivated and receptive, but I am not sure whether they understand the culture change that is necessary in the church to be a "servant leader" and build "spiritual fathers". Thursday we will start the first of two meetings in Accra. We are meeting in the center of the city and will have pastors coming from all over the metro area. At 6:00 PM on Friday, they will be joined by up to 50 other pastors that will be at the church. When we arrived at 6:00 in the evening the power was off in the whole city. We went to the only room that had some light and open doors that opened over the busiest Market in the city. We had to shout over the noise but God was gracious and the pastors responded.

Friday the battle is still raging. As we arrived at the church the power was still out and generator had not been fixed. In addition the pastors were having a difficult getting through traffic. After waiting an hour past our start time it was clear power was not going to be restored and if we were to be able to engage at all, we needed to move outside while there was a little light and work from a white board. Shortly after we started, the little light that we had, dissipated and we had to compete with the noise of Muslim sundown prayers and a Muslim message broadcasting over a loud speaker. (They didn't seem to lack for power) Using flashlights we were able to continue the process. Even with all the distractions the pastors caught the importance of building men as the foundation of the church and Servant Leadership. It became clear that even though these Pastors saw the need for Servant Leadership and had suffered under authoritative controlling leadership, they had little understanding of and virtually no models of Servant Leadership.

One of the younger pastors asked, "What are the characteristics of a Servant leader?" It was clear that although he had experienced the impacts of controlling leadership, he had never even seen Servant Leadership modeled. Ghana is a country where even though 80% of the population is practicing Christians... the culture is characterized by dishonesty, graft, fraud and theft. Because of the controlling model of "king leadership" the church is building church workers rather than Mature Disciples of Christ. I believe there is an incredible opportunity if the pastors were to understand, experience, and begin to lead as Servant Leaders. They would then reproduce mature disciples. Those would be disciples who were exhibiting Christ's character and could transform the country almost overnight.

Please pray that God will guard and move the Building Brothers Four Phase Process forward with the 80-100 pastors that we impacted... and begin this transformation!

