

Institutionalizing the Church (3)

Changes In the Purpose

Introduction:

1. For the past few weeks we have been giving consideration to institutionalizing the church.
2. It is clear in Scripture that the church is a functioning organism designed to teach the lost and to train the saved.
3. Already in this series we have learned that the church is not an institution or organizational entity that people get into to take them to heaven.
4. When the church is institutionalized there are subtle shifts in our allegiances. Before, we were loyal only to Christ. He alone was the object of our allegiance. With the creation of the church as an organizational entity or institution our loyalty shifted (almost outside our awareness) to the institution.
5. The subtle shifts are reflected in our language.
 - a. When someone falls away we refer to them as “forsaking the church” rather than “forsaking the Lord.”
 - b. We talk about “restoring the church” rather than “restoring personal obedience to God.”
 - c. Our doctrines become “Church of Christ doctrines” rather than “the doctrines of Christ.”
 - d. Our preachers are “Church of Christ preachers” rather than “gospel preachers.”
6. In institutionalism loyalty to the “party” takes precedence over personal loyalty to God’s word.
7. The area that I want to give special consideration to in this lesson is the effect that institutionalizing the church has on our work, our purpose of teaching the lost and training the saved.

Discussion:

- I. God had a definite purpose in sending Christ into the world. His purpose did not necessarily meet men’s expectations.
 - A. Luke 4:42ff describes an incident in the life of Jesus. He had been preaching in the synagogues and performing miracles. After going to a secluded place, the crowds searched for him and tried to keep him from leaving them. But He said, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.”
 1. What purpose? To heal the sick and cast out demons? No.
 2. To preach the kingdom of God.
 - B. In Luke 19:10 in Jesus’ encounter with Zaccheus he said, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”
 - C. Satan tried to thwart him (Matt. 4:1-11).
 - D. The people tried to make him a king according to their expectations (Jn. 6:15).
 - E. And when Jesus predicted His death to the disciples Peter objected saying, “God forbid it!” Jesus responded, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matt. 16:22-23). In another place He said, “For this purpose I came

to this hour" (Jn. 12:27).

- F. God's purpose was clear, but men wanted an earthly kingdom. They did not want the cross and tried to hinder Jesus from going there.
 - 1. Sometimes we are "innocent" in our expectations because we just do not understand God's purposes.
 - a. Those who tried to keep Jesus in their city were not bad people.
 - b. Peter was not a bad person because he did not want Jesus going to the cross.
 - c. Those who wanted Jesus to serve as an earthly king were not bad people.
 - d. They just did not understand the purpose of God.
 - 2. But if we understand God's purpose and go and support some other alternative, we will be found attempting to thwart the purpose of God.

II. God has a definite purpose for us (His people, the church). His purpose does not necessarily meet with man's expectations.

- A. The purpose, work or function of the church is spiritual in nature.
 - 1. The great commission summarizes the purpose well (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15; Lk. 24:47).
 - a. We are to "go and make disciples of all the nations."
 - b. "Teaching them to observe all that Christ commands."
 - c. We are to "preach the gospel to all creation."
 - d. To proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. We are to teach the lost and train the saved (Eph. 4:11-12).
 - 3. Supplemental to this work is the care of needy saints (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:1; Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35; 6:1-4; Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8 and 9).
- B. There are many other worthy works to be done in the world, but God's purpose for the church is narrowly focused.
 - 1. Even in the care of needy Christians there are restrictions (1 Tim. 5). Families have the first and primary responsibility (1 Tim. 5:16).
 - 2. No evidence of a program of general benevolence to non-Christians.
- C. People have expectations of the church that do not square with our purpose as defined by God.
 - 1. Callers wanting help with their rent, electric or water bill; wanting to know if we are giving out Christmas baskets.
 - 2. Some churches are involved in the hospital business.
 - 3. These are not bad people. They are good people with good intentions, compassionate people, loving people, interested in good works. But the works are just not the work of the local church.
 - 4. How do we know that? Why is there no mention of it in Scripture?
 - 5. I fear that we create an institution of which we take ownership. It becomes "Our Church" with "Our purposes," and well intentioned though we be, our allegiance has subtly moved from God's purposes to our own. We get a good feeling when we do what men expect because they commend us for it. We even commend ourselves.

III. Evidences of changes in the purpose; Churches focusing on Recreation, Entertainment, Secular education, Social ills.

- A. News item from Lubbock, Texas, "Broadway church of Christ wins two basketball games."
 - 1. Is the church in the recreation business?
 - 2. "This is just used as a tool to create the opportunity to preach to the people."
- B. From Texline, Texas, "The recreation hall, a short distance east of the church is equipped for ping pong and a number of other games. It can also be used for skating parties. The building also has a completely equipped kitchen and other facilities for serving banquets. The building is available to all organizations improving the community." Is it the work of the church to improve the community through entertainment or through making disciples?
- C. What happens in so many instances is that churches become institutions designed to improve the community through recreation, entertainment, secular education, social issues (poverty, disease, hunger) etc. What about improving the community through preaching the gospel?
- D. Why didn't the first century church go the route of so many churches today? Different purpose! Different allegiance! Are we changing the purpose of the church to suit ourselves?
- E. Like Peter we have NOT set our minds on God's interests, but man's (Matt. 16:23). Peter was well-intentioned. He just did not understand. Like the crowd who wanted Jesus to stay in their town we are well-intentioned. We just do not understand that it is our purpose to preach the kingdom of God in other cities also (Lk. 4:42ff).

Conclusion:

1. The Lord's church is a functioning organism designed to teach the lost and train those already saved.
2. It is not a static institution. It is not an institution designed to meet men's expectations of what they think the church should do.
3. It is God's church. It needs to be busy about His business. It was never designed to meet our needs for recreation, entertainment, or even to meet our need for doing good things.
4. Let's be busy with the work that God has given us to do.