

# The Condition of the Church Today

## A Warning About the Enemy Within

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Introduction

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- I. An Introduction to the Study on the Condition of the Church Today
  - A. Why a study like this?
    1. Consider the influence of culture on our lives:
      - a. Generally speaking, we are raised in a nation which has its own culture – a culture that is somewhat different from other nations and people groups. Our national culture influences us in a variety of ways.
        - (1) It influences our thinking, our beliefs, our desires, and our values.
        - (2) It influences our view of life and education and work and play.
        - (3) It influences our expectations of government and educators and employers and parents.
        - (4) And it influences such things as our expectations for the future, what we wear, our religious beliefs, and if we are religious, how we practice our religion.
      - b. However, culture and its influences do not come from one source.
        - (1) Different areas of the country have their own, almost unique, aspects of culture that add to the influence of the national culture.
        - (2) And then there is the home. Each home has differences that are layered on top of the cultural influences of the nation and the region.
        - (3) And of course, both of these cultural influences affect how we think about most things – including religion and our practice of religion.
      - c. Finally, if you are religious, your church or denomination is in itself a culture. And it is a culture that influences how you think of God, what you expect of God, what you believe God expects of you, how you understand the scriptures and the emphasis you place on certain scriptures, how you worship, when and where you serve God, the form of church government, and many other important aspects of religious belief and practice.
        - (1) Give examples of some contrasting church cultures:
          - (a) What we expect of God – wrath vs. love and tolerance.

- (b) What we believe God expects of us – to be holy vs. to fail, to consistently and perpetually fall short.
  - (c) How we worship – no instruments vs. loud music, drums.
  - (d) When and where we serve God – in church, para church, overseas missions.
  - (e) Form of church government – Elders led, Pastor ruled, democracy.
- (2) Without any question, we here at Redford Church have our own culture, and it too is a significant influence on all of us who continue to attend this church.
2. It is my experience that most Christians do not think about the influence culture has in our lives, or on our beliefs, values, choices, and behavior. Christians generally assume they are simply doing what the Bible says when it comes to theology, Bible interpretation, church practices, and personal Christian living.
- a. It is also my experience that most of those who do understand that culture has some influence on us, don't like to admit that they themselves or their practice of Christianity is influenced by all these cultures. Yet that is the reality of life. And it is a reality that is hard to break free of.
  - b. In fact, it is almost as if no matter what you do to stop the influence of the varied cultures we're raised in, they still seep into our lives like water seeping into an old basement. It finds the cracks and porous areas of the wall and works its way in, causing moisture on the walls and puddles on the floor.
3. Now it is possible you may be thinking that my view of cultures influence on Christianity is only negative or bad. It is not. There are good influences that arise from these varied cultures, and they are worth supporting and encouraging.
- a. For example, many of us work hard to create an atmosphere, or in actuality, a culture in our home that protects our children – and even us adults – from many of the unhealthy and outright evil influences of the world outside the home. Why? Because we believe that cultural can be good and cultural influences can be used for promoting and protecting what is good.
  - b. However, it is not my intention in this study to focus on the good influences of the varied cultures that press in on us. My intention is to show us the unwholesome, the misleading, the spiritually harmful, and the outright ungodly influences that are pressing in on us from the current church culture.

4. Which brings us back to the question of why take a look at the condition of the church today? Here are my three reasons.
  - a. First, culture is a powerful force, and its influence quietly creeps into far more areas of our lives than most of us are aware of. And as we shall see as we continue this study, the general culture within the Christian church today has a powerful impact on the thinking, beliefs, values, and practices of those who attend church, and that includes us. The fact is, we are not immune to the influences of the prevailing Church culture of our day.
  - b. Second, the prevailing church culture of our day has some serious flaws and outright ungodly aspects to it. Yet because it is the prevailing church culture today, its influence – both the good and godly parts, and the flaws and ungodly parts – not only travels far and wide, it is all promoted as Biblically sound, and is generally accepted as right and good. This means the prevailing church culture of our day – both its good parts and ungodly parts – are influencing all who are touched by it.
  - c. Third, when a threat to our spiritual well-being comes from outside the church, we spot it quicker and are usually eager to take the steps necessary to fight against it. But when that threat comes from inside the church, it is harder to see and harder for many of us to believe it is a real threat – especially when it is supported by so many, and sounds so right, and feels so good.
    - (1) And this is what we are up against with the ungodly parts of the prevailing church culture of our day. It is an enemy that resides within the church, and it is an enemy that is acclaimed and promoted as if it comes from God himself. In fact, to speak against many of these ungodly influences is taken by many Christians as speaking against God and the purposes of God and the health of the church.
    - (2) My point here is that this enemy, because it comes from within, is easily overlooked by most of the Christians of our day. And to some measure, we are part of those who don't see the threat for what it is.
  - d. Therefore, my goal in this study has three parts to it.
    - (1) First, I intend to point out some of these harmful influences that reside within the general church culture of our day.
    - (2) Second, I hope to show how these influences are affecting you personally, and how they are affecting us as a church or how they could affect us if we buy into them.

- (3) Third, I am doing this to give you an **open eyed** opportunity to decide if you are going to cling to the harmful thinking and practices of the current church culture, or if you are going to turn away from them and choose a different path.
- e. Finally, as we look at each one of the harmful influences that make up the prevailing church culture of our day, we will also look at God's word regarding God and His ways in relation to the false influence. My intention in doing this is to provide a basis from God's word to choose a different path than the popular one.

## B. Scripture Warnings and Examples

1. Now that I have attempted to explain why we are doing this study, you may be wondering if there is any biblical basis for such a study. After all, my explanation of "why" included no scripture references.
  - a. My first response to such wondering is that I have no intention of basing this study on philosophy or psychology or the social sciences – though I may point to them in reference to some of the false cultural influences in the church today. It is my intention, from start to end, to base this study on the Word of God, and use this study to point us toward God.
  - b. Therefore, I do have several scripture references that I want us to look at to support the "why" of this study.
2. Warnings about bad or even false teaching in the church:
  - a. **II Timothy 3:1-7** . . . But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. [2] For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, [4] treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these. [6] For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, [7] always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
    - (1) First, notice that this is a warning against the influence of people who are inside the church, but are in an apostate condition (unfaithful to the scriptures).
    - (2) Second, it is a warning that not only attendees will be this way, but leaders and teachers will be this way as well. And

these teachers will influence the weaker, the less mature, and the more naive Christians to follow their false teaching.

- (3) NOTE: Paul concludes this chapter by affirming that those who are like this in the church will continue to get worse (**vs. 13**). And so he exhorts us to hold fast to the scriptures, for they contain the sure path to life (**vs. 16-17**).

b. **II Timothy 4:1-5** . . . I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. [3] 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, [4] and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. [5] But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(1) First, God begins with an exhortation to hold the line of truth because there will be those in the church who will want to move the line – and in moving the line, they will weaken or pervert the truth.

(2) Second, God says it will be the attendees who will grow weary of the truth – seeing it as a burden too heavy to bear. In their weariness, they will push for an easier gospel, a lighter load, and a less demanding form of Christianity. And in their pushing, they will accumulate (***amass, pile up***) teachers that will accommodate them. NOTE: The word ACCUMULATE implies two things here:

(a) First, it implies large numbers, possibly to the point of being the majority rather than the minority. Think about the influence shift when the majority of church preachers, teachers, and leaders give the people the easier gospel they want. In fact, this portion of scripture pits one leader (Timothy) against many (the attendees wanting an easier gospel and the leaders willing to give it to them).

(b) Second, it implies that church attendees will make it financially rewarding to be the kind of teacher they want, for that is the only way they could amass teachers of that kind.

- (3) Finally, God ends with another exhortation to hold the line.
- c. **Matthew 7:15-17** . . . Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? [17] So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.
- (1) In this portion of scripture, Jesus is warning us against false teachers – those who have the appearance and words of a sincere Christian, but not the message. They lack the message because their motives are heavily diluted by selfishness and pride. In other words, they are using the organized church to satisfy their hunger for things like fame, importance, power, influence, and financial security. Therefore, though their teaching and actions have the sound and look of spirituality, their message is false and they are using the church as a place to gain the things that will satisfy their unholy desires.
- (2) Jesus then provides a basis for discerning godly teachers from the false teachers. The basis He provides is the fruit born by their efforts. And the fruit born by their efforts is made evident by the spiritual condition of those they lead.
- d. **II Peter 2:1-3** . . . But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. [2] Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; [3] and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.
- (1) First, God uses the history of Israel to provide an indication of what will happen in the church – false teachers will enter in.
- (2) Second, those who follow the false teachers will follow them because the false teaching appeals to the fleshly side of their nature (*Many will follow their sensuality*).
- (3) Third, the false teachers will take advantage of their followers by speaking as if they are serving God and seeking the good of those they minister to. Yet the truth is that they are

seeking their own interests, and whatever they hope to gain from their efforts.

- (a) How do we know this? Because they will not announce themselves as false teachers.
- (b) In fact, they will hide their true nature by presenting themselves as being called and appointed by God, and anointed by the Holy Spirit. And they will claim they are serving the Lord and not themselves.

## II. Conclusion

### **Prove Ye Every Spirit**

Zion's Harp, #127

Apostolic Christian Church Hymnal

Prove ye, prove ye every spirit, as the Master did command it;  
Know their works, not words alone, men, as trees, by fruits are known.  
Are their fruits, their works, and teaching based on doctrines Christ was preaching?  
Do they love and teach the truth? Will their wisdom God approve?

Thus their righteousness beholding, all in outward form unfolding,  
Inwardly they will appear hostile to Thy children here.  
He who lives in true obedience can discern the voice and presence  
Of such strangers which draw near; may we flee when they appear.

Though the wolves be ever raging, Thou Thy fold art still defending,  
When such spirits do assail, we who know Thee will prevail.  
Lord, do Thou dispel confusion, erring ones free from delusion.  
Savior, may Thy fold increase, grant us comfort, joy, and peace!