

The Condition of the Church Today

A Warning About the Enemy Within

Examples of False Teaching - Part 4

May 15, 2011

I. Review:

A. Over the past seven Sundays, we have been looking at the Condition of the Church Today, and specifically in relation to the Enemy Within. Several weeks ago I identified false teaching in relation to obeying God completely and loving Him supremely as the first and foremost threat to the spiritual health of the church. Three weeks ago I identified false teaching in relation to salvation and God's grace as the second biggest threat to the spiritual well-being of the church – the reason being that it sets the tone for how we come into the Christian life and how we go forward in living the Christian life. Last Sunday we took a small detour in order to take a comprehensive look at Salvation as spoken of in numerous scriptures. Today, we will return to the third major example of false teaching threatening the church today.

B. Pray

II. Examples of False Teaching Within the Church: **Failing to keep the eternal elevated above the temporal, or failing to protect the spiritual at the expense of our flesh, or using appeals to our fleshly interests in order to gain new converts and build the local church.**

A. **II Timothy 3:1-5** . . . But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come [*when church attendees will not endure sound teaching*]. [2] For men [*those within the church*] will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers [*strongly, abusively, contemptuously criticize*], disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] unloving, irreconcilable [*impossible to deal with*], malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal [*cruel, vicious*], haters of good, [4] treacherous [*betray the faith*], 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.

1. How could it ever happen that the Church of Jesus Christ would get into this condition? And yet, here is God warning us that this is the condition the church will be in one day. This makes me want to ask, how such thinking and behavior become popular in the church? Aren't the things I just read from the list in **II Timothy 3** the exact opposite of the Christian life? How is it that they will become acceptable?

2. I believe there are two prominent explanations for how such things as these become popular in the church – the foolishness of God’s people and false teaching by God’s ministers.
- B. Having said that, it is my opinion that the third most pressing threat to the spiritual health of the church today is the practice – deliberately or naively – of appealing to people’s fleshly self-interest, their worldly desires, their pride as expressed through their quest for self-importance, their longing for moments of happiness or rest from the weariness of life, and their sensuality, in order to win converts, attract people to the church, and keep them in the church. Now I want to be clear about this, this threat is made possible because many of those who come to church want this kind of church experience!
1. And as we can see from the seven letters to the seven churches of Revelation and from God’s warning in **II Timothy 3:1-5**, a church can be filled with people, filled with religious activities, filled with teaching based on passages of scripture, have what appears to be evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and adhere to widely accepted theology, and still elevate the temporal above the eternal or use appeals to our fleshly interests to gain new converts and increase attendance.
 2. However, for most of us, this threat is hard to see because those employing these methods and those wanting these methods and teachings have not abandoned the Word of God, or most of the other activities that go along with doing church. What they have done, however, is to alter the emphasis of the true gospel from the superiority and purposes of God to the felt-needs, personal benefits, and happiness of those in attendance.
 - a. For example, it is common for church folks to express a certain amount of boredom with the traditional style church service. So what have some churches done to combat this? They have introduced certain practices into the church service that help keep the attention of those in attendance.
 - b. To me, the two questions we ought to be asking are:
 - (1) Why are so many so easily bored with church?
 - (2) And why is it that the accepted, and even promoted remedy is to change the church meeting so that where once it was boring to those in attendance, it is now exciting and attention grabbing?

3. In considering these two questions, it seems obvious to me that the currently preferred remedy for boredom among God's people is for the church to focus its attention on what is being experienced on the outside of those in attendance, as if the solution to boredom was a matter of the circumstances rather than the heart.
 - a. Or, to put this in Bible language, the preferred remedy for boredom among those attending church, is to indulge their love of the world, gratify their lusts of the flesh, tantalize their lusts of the eyes, and bolster their pride – all with the intention of keeping them interested in and excited about coming to church.
 - (1) However, this is like giving a cancer patient sweet tasting placebos in hopes that one day he will agree to take the far less pleasant medicine that can actually cure him.
 4. Now I acknowledge that many churches direct their attention at the outside of those in attendance with the hope that those who come, and especially those who continue coming, will one day do the Christian thing about what is going on inside them.
 - a. But is this a realistic expectation in an environment like this? Doesn't God say: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. [17] The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (**I John 2:15-17**).
 - b. Since the scripture says it is impossible to love the allurements of this world and love God at the same time, is it not obvious that we cannot use the allurements of the world to bring people to God and to a sincere love for God?
 5. And yet, the use of the allurements of this world does bring people into the church and it does go a long way at solving the boredom problem. But attendance at church and excitement about going to church under these conditions does not make you a child of God, or a Christ-like believer, or one who chooses to lose his own life in order to gain eternal life.
- C. The current popular solution to Christian boredom is but one example of what I want to talk about today. As I have already stated, this third threat to the spiritual health of the church is built around appealing to people's fleshly self-interest, their worldly desires, their pride and their

quest for self-importance, their longing for moments of happiness or rest from the weariness of life, and their sensuality – all of which is done to win converts, attract people to the church, and keep them in the church.

1. And to help us see the subtlety and pervasiveness of this threat, I would like us to consider what I am calling the Entertainment Factor and the Music Driven Worship Factor.
2. There are several other Factors that fit into this category, such as the Self-Esteem Factor, but we will save them for another time.

D. **The Entertainment Factor:** From the general atmosphere of the Sunday service to the activities of the youth group, and from the multi-media to the pastor's preaching, entertainment has become a popular method of gaining and keeping adherents.

1. And why not, many ask? It works? People come – unbelievers come, and those who are only somewhat interested in Christianity come, and those who are believers but are turned off on church – they come too. So why criticize it?
2. **First** of all, by its very nature, entertainment is audience focused with the goal of pleasing them sufficiently to get them to give you something you want from them. In other words, the entertainer designs an experience for the audience that is intended to move the audience to give the entertainer what he wants from them. This is the nature of entertainment, and bringing it into the church or trying to christianize it cannot change its nature.
 - a. Now to please the audience, several factors have to be taken into consideration by those doing the entertaining:
 - (1) To please the audience, you have to know your audience and tailor the entertainment to them. Or you have to develop a form of entertainment that appeals to a large enough group to get some of them to attend and respond as hoped for.
 - (2) To please the audience, you must give them something that is pleasing to their senses or their self-interest or their pride, or you must do something that helps them forget about the troubles and difficulties of life for a time.
 - b. Therefore, the kind and amount of entertainment used in the church is dictated by the kind and size of audience each church wants to reach and how far those in leadership will go in pleasing the sensual side of their attendance.
 - c. And so I ask you, isn't this just another way to make me more important than God? And how is any church going to encourage

me to bend the knee before the true God when they are reinforcing the idea that I am more important than God?

3. **Second**, Entertainment is a form of amusement.
 - a. The word amusement is made up of one word with an “a” as its prefix and “ment” on the end. That one word is “muse.”
 - b. Muse means to ponder or seriously consider or mull over or meditate on something. When you put an “a” in front of the word muse it is like putting the word “not” in front of muse. Hence you are saying “not muse,” or you are saying the opposite of musing which is to stop thinking or stop pondering or stop seriously considering.
 - c. Therefore, when the church turns to amusement, it is not only promoting a self-focus at the expense of a God-focus, it is discouraging sensible, serious minded thinking. And I ask you, how can we see ourselves as we really are, and how can we apply the truth of God word as it is meant to be applied, and how can we grow in our faith without sensible, serious minded thinking?
4. To recap – entertainment in the church diverts our attention from God to self, from the will of God to what feels good, and from living for God to finding a place I can return to week after week that encourages me to make me the primary focus of my life.

E. **The Music Driven Worship Factor:** For God’s people, worship and music, worship and clapping, worship and dancing, worship and prayer, and worship and a joy-filled heart have gone together since – probably – the beginning of time. I am pointing this out because I want to make it clear that there is something very right – an maybe even natural – about expressing our worship through our music or in our dancing or in our clapping or in raising our arms toward heaven or in our praying or with a joyful face. Without question, sincere minded Christians have used some or all of these outward actions to express what they feel in their heart toward God.

1. However, the problem in our day is what I call music driven worship. And here is why I see music driven worship as a problem.
 - a. First, it is a ready made worship service where the music sets the tone and provides the stimulus for worship because it is not expected that those in attendance will bring worship with them. In other words, regardless of how those in attendance have treated God or how much they have complained to God throughout

the preceding week, they need only to step into this music driven experience to feel as if they are worshiping God.

- b. Second, when it is loud and rock style with a pounding beat, it has more to do with stimulating the audiences senses than with providing an avenue for the audience to express the deep adoration for God and grateful thanksgiving they brought with them. And when the worship leader selects music that is emotionally moving and arranges it so that our emotions are heightened as we go from song to song, it has more to do with creating an atmosphere that feels like God is there than giving an opportunity for worshipers to pour out worship and praise to the God they have adored and intimately communed with all week.
2. In other words music driven worship is far more focused on how I feel in relation to worshiping God than on worshiping God himself. It has more to do with a worship experience that starts on the outside and may move inward, than on a worship experience that starts on the inside and expresses itself outwardly.
3. Without question, music driven worship services can be vibrant and stimulating and emotional, but not because of the praise and adoration the people bring with them, but because of what the worship service is doing for the audience at the moment.
4. Let me ask several questions to help us think about worship in relation to what I have been talking about:
 - a. What would happen if we replaced the vibrant, pulsating music with old style hymns? How many would lose their enthusiasm for worship? And how many would deem the worship time dull and boring and unfulfilling?
 - b. What would happen in a church where worship is music driven if you removed the music and replaced it with silence? In fact, what would happen in most churches if we came before the Lord in silence and waited for praise and worship to erupt? How long would we have to wait for folks to search within to see what praise and worship is in them? And once they discovered some awe and adoration for God within themselves, how many of them would gush with praise and worship like so many of us gush over our grandchildren or over a favorite sports team or over a new car or whatever other earthly things we tend to gush over?
5. What is my point? In too many places and in numerous ways, the church has used music to change the worship service so that the

worship time no longer depends on what flows out of us because of the awe and adoration that has been welling up inside of us, but rather it depends on the songs and instruments that stimulate our senses and carry us forward in what many have come to believe is worship itself.

6. I watched this kind of transformation happen in the late sixties and seventies. Without question, most worship times were dry and empty, and those in attendance seemed just as dry and empty. The solution was to write worship music that set a different tone for the worship service. I am telling you this because the solution then and the practice of many now is hardly different. Writing new music, adding rock band instruments, and turning up the volume is an effort to improve and stimulate worship by effecting the outside of the worshiper rather than calling for repentance and a true change on the inside.
7. Jesus said two things that I believe are important to what we are talking about here:
 - a. **Matthew 23:26** . . . First clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.
 - b. **John 4:23** . . . But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will **worship the Father in spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.
 - c. There is no true worship that does not begin on the inside with awe, adoration, reverence, thanksgiving, and gratitude, along with godly living.
8. To recap, the problem today is not the presence or absence of music in worship, but what is in the heart of the worshiper twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. To worship corporately in spirit and in truth means coming with worship welling up within us and using the worship time to give public expression to it.

III. Conclusion

- A. Church is for us, primarily speaking, but not for us to lose our minds in entertainment and amusements, but for us to renew our minds and use our minds to press forward in living godly in Christ Jesus.
- B. Worship is for God, and corporate worship is a time to join with others in expressing our love and admiration and gratitude toward God so that from us, corporately, rises a sweet aroma of praise and adoration to God.