The Church Today

For a great many of us, the Church of Christ no longer has the purpose God gave it. It is easy to see how we have picked up from one another the idea that what is generally called *"the Church"* is the place where people with shared religious interests gather.

We were taught to believe that it is the place where people sing, pray, take part in a religious service, chat a little once the service is over, and then each goes off to their own personal concerns and interests. So for many, the Church has become nothing more than a place to recover the peace of mind lost during the week because of a hectic lifestyle.

The vast majority of members are simply spectators at these religious services; their ministry consists of being present, sitting in the pew, and contributing a certain amount of money to the needs of the congregation. A very small number of members have the ministry of putting on *this program.*

In this way we were assured that, after the new birth, God is somewhere far away and does not get very involved in a person's life. And most of us stop at about this first stage. We went to church, we had our seat, we confessed our sins, we were baptized, we sang, we upheld the teachings of the church we belong to, convinced that this is how we would enter the Kingdom of God. So in these congregations the ordinary member is a mere consumer; he has nothing he is responsible for doing, and attending the meetings is his only duty. In most large congregations, the members know one another only by sight.

Because of these teachings, many of those on the membership list no longer come to these services, and the buildings are fairly empty at some worship services. In many congregations there is a huge gap between the membership list and those who actually come to worship. And so we have come to believe it is normal for a congregation to have many people who do not attend meetings for months or years and yet remain on the membership list.

From what we see almost everywhere today, we can tell that Satan has managed to distort the role of the Church, the meaning of the Body of Christ. Through the false teaching that "salvation is nothing more than the forgiveness of sins" (a teaching that lies at the foundation of the great religious organizations), he has deceived people into thinking there is no need for discipleship or for the school of Christ.

Most of us were taught that God has done everything for us, that through faith in the sacrifice on the cross we obtain salvation, which consists of the forgiveness of sins. We were taught that perfection of character cannot be reached, that no one can add anything to the work of salvation accomplished on the cross.

Discipleship

Through this false teaching he set out to do away with discipleship and with the importance of the school of Christ (the Church), deceiving people into thinking these are not part of the plan of salvation. Satan has worked hard to keep people from understanding the role the Body of Christ plays in the work of growing and perfecting the saints.

The doctrine that reduces salvation to the forgiveness of sins alone has led many to stop giving any importance to the Body of Christ. Those who accepted this teaching have had their eyes closed to the role of the Church, and they no longer see their need for the Body of Christ and for members to whom they are closely joined. This is true both of those on the membership lists of congregations that amount to nothing more than worship services, and of those who have chosen to live their life of faith on their own. *(And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field. Ezekiel 34:5)*

Both of these situations are very dangerous, because they are in fact a rejection of Christ's work of growing and building up the members in the Church, in His Body. (Gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:21)

On the foundation of this false teaching, Satan has succeeded in deceiving people into thinking that "the Church" amounts to nothing more than worship and preaching in buildings fitted out with auditoriums, where people receive only religious education.

We can easily see that this teaching has made discipleship to Christ nonexistent in today's religious movements, and hardly anyone still believes they must live as a disciple in order to reach the stature of their Teacher.

Anyone willing to look more closely will notice that Satan, like a great merchant, has spared no effort to build a vast religious empire with which to keep people in darkness, so that they will not know the truth about the Church of Christ.

So he has placed religious organizations in every country (like supermarket chains) that offer people nothing but **religious programs**, and he has managed to catch billions of people in this trap. Not one of them has built into its doctrine the discipleship whose sole aim is to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

If we look at these religious movements, we easily see how well Satan has succeeded in deceiving mankind, for they all practice this institutionalized system of worship. From Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans to the modern evangelical movements, they all follow the same organizational pattern, with buildings built specifically for worship and preaching. In this way the Church has become merely a center of religious education and has lost its purpose; it is no longer the place set apart for the growth and perfecting of the saints, at which the heavenly

powers look and marvel. (To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10-11)

First of all, Satan worked to replace the spiritual fathers and shepherds whose task is to raise their children (their disciples). They have been replaced with pastors and leaders in preaching, with ministers devoted solely to worship services, whose only task is religious education and keeping the flock in a scattered state, and certainly not raising children. (The wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. John 10:12)

So whoever wants to live out the life of a disciple in practice, which involves a relationship of infant (child) to parent, will find himself in the absurd situation of not finding a single spiritual father.

This happens because today, in these religious organizations, spiritual fathers are completely absent, fathers such as the apostle Paul was to Timothy, Titus and Onesimus, and indeed to many others; they have been replaced with pastor-preachers, committee members, youth leaders… (see Paul's letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon)

For those who accept the pattern of a church built on religious programs, the real Church, in which the members are closely joined to one another and together make up the Body of Christ, remains a great mystery. For those who stay with this pattern, the Church described in Holy Scripture has no practical application. (This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:32)

The question each of us must ask is: What mystery does the Church hold? For whom is it a mystery? Is it a mystery for us too?

This article is taken from the booklet The Church, the Body of Christ – Online Booklet – Unmodified Word, available free online in .pdf format.

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