The Real Thing

26 April 2017



As we allow the Lord His rightful place as Head of the Church, we're seeing a need for a lot of our lifestyle practices to be changed. For instance, in the past, one saw 'church-people' being recognised by the way they dressed on a Sunday and also because of the 'church' buildings they entered into for worship purposes. Today, we believe God is restoring a 'lifestyle' that will allow us, irrespective of the way we dress or the buildings we attend, to be seen as His church. This is seen by the way we worship Him, approach life and by the way we respond to difficult circumstances in the work place and in life.

Recognised as Authentic Christians

As we allow the Holy Spirit the opportunity to help us live lives that glorify Christ, we are learning new truths about church. God wants people to see His presence in us. The Bible tells us that God wants others to recognise us as 'believers' by who we are, not by our religious practices that very seldom affect other people's lives.

By being Kingdom-centered (i.e. 'God and other people' -centered) we want our lifestyle and speech to make who we are so obvious to others that we won't have to call attention to it. For instance, if you are a man, we know that you don't have to go to the shopping mall to tell people that you are a male – they can see it. It's obvious. When we call attention to the obvious, we are seen as behaving strangely. Well, it should be exactly the same when we live out the Acts 2:42-47 blueprint in our lives on a 24/7 basis. We'll be seen as followers of Christ who make up His Church and, as a result, won't have to continually call attention to the obvious.

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This was the case in Antioch, where we are told that the early disciples were recognised as believers because of their lifestyles, and, as a result, were later called 'Christians' by the unsaved community. Note, they didn't call themselves Christians, because if they did so, this would simply draw attention to the obvious. No, Scripture tells us *'they were first called Christians in Antioch'*

(Acts 11:26). These people were sold out to Christ's cause, resulting in their being recognised as Christians in everything they did and in everything they said (Philemon 1-7). As a leadership, we are desperate for God's kingdom to be seen in each of our lives in exactly the same way.

This is why it's our desire to continually refocus our attention back onto Christ and His original blueprint; an exciting blueprint that resulted in people being added to the local church daily. This is also why it's so important for each one of us to be willing to let go of any incorrect concept of church with which we might have been influenced in the past. We need to allow God to enable us to become the exciting, community-changing people He always intended us to be, i.e. to become a people who have a lifestyle that others have always longed for; a lifestyle that reflects life, forgiveness, acceptance, community, hope and laughter.

Faulty Foundations

In the past, it has often been the inadequate preaching of the Gospel coupled together with an inconsistent Christ-centered lifestyle, and further frustrated by the absence of a basic doctrinal foundation, that has resulted in many people not being 'fully born' into the Kingdom. When this happens, we find some 'Christians' not willing to submit to the leading of the eldership, others who have a non-committal attitude in attending vital meetings of the church, whether on a Sunday or mid-week, others who are ill-disciplined in their personal times with the Lord, and still others who argue against tithing and financial support. Basically, these people are still independent in spirit, with a limited understanding of the claims of the lordship of Christ on their lives. Over the years, men such as Dr. Billy Graham believe that tens of thousands who have 'responded' to the Gospel fall away because inadequate 'spiritual birth procedures' have been put into place. This happens when the new converts are not informed of the Holy Spirit coming into their lives at conversion; when they are not given instruction concerning baptism; and are not introduced to a local church family and community (life group) so that they can be cared for and discipled from day one.

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Because we as leaders desire God's best for His church, we DON'T want to produce a mutant breed of genetically 'in-house' engineered 'converts'. That is, a breed of people whose relationship with the Lord and others is established on what we think, and not on what the Scriptures say. We don't want to expose people to teachings that will result in them being left with a shallow and inadequate theological base and philosophy of church.

On the contrary, we are convinced that the real Gospel is not 'Come to Jesus and get all your desires fulfilled', but rather 'Jesus is Lord, so what are we all going to do about it?' We want the mystery and the majesty of our God to be lived out through the lives of each one of us coming together to form His church, in the city and the nations. As leaders, we want to do everything possible, with our God's help, to assist each member in this church family to regain the capacity to live in the exciting manifest presence of our God, with increasing intensity, every day.

Unity in Community

Finally, two of the primary values we hold dear are our personal relationships with our God and Father, and our community relationships with each other, as Christ's church. We have come to realise that God lives in our friendships, not in our meetings. It is the love or lack of it between us,

i.e. the love God puts in our hearts for each other as His people, that will attract others to Him. People will always firstly be attracted to us and our values, and only thereafter attracted to our God. People must first see something in us they desire before we go offering them something synthetic in which they find no worth. The Bible says that we are the *'living stones'* that build up this thing called the church, and it is God's love within us that acts as the cement binding us together (1 Peter 2:4,5 and Ephesians 2:19-22).

God wants to build us together in such a way that His strength will be seen through our unity. But our enemy, the Devil, knows this truth and wants to infiltrate our relationships, split us apart, divide us, create offence and cause the *'living stones'* to be detached from each other. This is why we need to know who we are and why we are here, so that we can become intentional about practically loving each other, speaking well of each other, and being patient and more accommodating with each other.

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It has been said that there is no time like the present, so right now could be a great time to get alone with God, and, as you do, re-establish your covenant with Him by making a fresh commitment on your part towards the other believers involved in your local church family.

A great starting point would be to firstly covenant with the Lord in your commitment to love the guys and girls in your church family. This can be done by faithfully attending both the Sunday and midweek community meetings, as well as our corporate monthly gathering times when all the congregations come together at one venue. Everything else on your social agenda should come second to these designated 'church family times' together, because our fellowship with each other will result in God's blessings coming upon our individual and family members.