

The Right Church? 8-5-01

Heb 11:10 (NIV)¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

I have recently reached what to me is a startling conclusion but one I feel sure is quite realistic. In this life there are no perfect anythings. Only Jesus is perfect. We live in a fallen world. There is especially no perfect church nor will there be until Jesus returns. In fact, that is a blessing! We need the imperfections to help us grow. We need to face the difficulties the imperfections present to see how much we need to change, how much we need Jesus to be head of the church and deal with those problems.

Any church you attend is a human organization. By that I mean, we set up a structure of some kind for the purpose of making things orderly. Even the very charismatic churches that claim they are led only by the Spirit and have no plan, fall into patterns that take the place of a bulletin. This is not a bad thing but we do need to recognize that the structure is man made thing. Denominations have thick books that explain their structure, backed by Scripture of course. Funny how there are so many variations – all backed by Scripture. We all would like to believe the way we worship is the one best way, the best organization, pattern, the one closest to Scripture, but lets be honest. One man on fire with an anointing from God started the pattern and those who came after pretty much stuck with it. That is true in almost every group. Here's the rub, what was a most fitting way for that leader and his converts to worship may not be the best for that group today. What helped them focus on the Lord Jesus then may be of little help in today's changing world. The Father is looking for people to worship Him in Spirit and truth. Not a particular style, not a particular pattern, not even all the right doctrines. Truth is a person – the man Christ Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life and the only way to the Father.

God is preparing a bride for Jesus but the work is not finished. She is the church. It includes people throughout time in many of these organizations of man but just because you attend one of them does not mean you are a part of the bride. Since she is still in preparation we can expect changes will need to be made, problems will arise, until the preparation is completed. Last week we talked about how God uses suffering to increase our capacity for Christ, our dependency on Him. Some of the greatest suffering comes through our fellowship with believers. We expect more of those we are closest to. We give more, and invest more, and so we bear our heart more, thus opening up ourselves to be hurt more deeply.

In the very best organized church, what do you have but growing believers. That means at times they will be walking in the flesh. It may be religious flesh but it is still flesh and the works of the flesh will result. I thought if a group of believers really understood the Word and were filled with the Spirit we would have a kind of heaven on earth where multitudes are finding Christ and growing. There would be no problems or conflict and all would have the same understanding of God's will and direction. Wouldn't that be nice? Well, it may be a great thought but if you look carefully at the early church you find that only partly the case.

There are people in that first century church complaining, lying, slandering, factions, arguments, competition, personal preference, lust, greed, and false teachers. That kind of changes my perspective. If they were there then why would they be missing today?

So why does God allow the tares to grow up amongst the wheat – as Jesus put it? What purpose does that serve? I think it is part of the chink chink chink we talked about, the shaping of the stones. We are on our way to glory – to the expression of the attributes of God. We see reflections of the glory of God in the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of our brothers and sisters, or we could say we meet Christ in each other at times. But the perfect consistency of His expressing his life in us must wait till we see Him and the work is completed, the temple is finished.

Solomon said, 2Chron 2:6 But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?

Solomon recognized he could not build a Temple for God to inhabit. All he could do was make the shadow of the temple to come, a place where sacrifice is offered to God. The true temple, the one God desires, is being built by the builder of everything, Jesus. (Heb 3:3,4) And the sacrifice is a broken and contrite heart. Mt 16:18 ...I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. The building is still under construction, and the Master Builder is Jesus. When you're building there is always a mess. Chips of block, pieces of board, nails here and there, sawdust everywhere. That is the church today.

Our transformation *metamorphoo* is not complete. That word implies a change of the very nature. There is another Greek word for a change in style or outer form but *metamorphoo* is a change in the very nature. Since it is not complete we get lazy in our Spiritual walk, we are tempted and yield to the flesh – and in that flesh there is no good thing. We criticize and put down a brother because we are proud. We argue our position and perspective not out of love but out of a desire to be superior. The Spirit points out our failure to walk humbly before our God. And so the chink chink chink continues. One of the biggest distractions in the church is wanting everyone to see my revelation and walk according to it. The Spirit reveals something to me and I feel it is my job to convince everyone that this revelation is something they should see and walk in. I forget the LORD is their Shepherd, and a Great Shepherd at that. I can share - but only the Spirit can bring revelation. John 6:63 ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. John 16:13-14 (NIV)¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

If Jesus speaks the word through you, if what you shared is Jesus, then those words will bring life. If they are your own, don't expect to see any results.

Like the early church we face times when a person should be expelled from our midst because of unrepentant and blatant sin. Most church organizations today don't even bother to do this and they wonder why the leaven grows and spreads throughout the congregation. There are those who would be sympathetic and those who would be even

harsher. Either way we have to learn to seek the LORD together and set aside our fleshly personalities and look to what the Holy Spirit is speaking.

But the most common is the idol of personal preference. We mask it very well with religious vocabulary, expressions like, "I'll pray over that." Another is, "I think the LORD's will is..." when the reality is we are arguing for our own personal experience and comfort zone, or maybe even our personal vision. We come from different backgrounds with different experiences and so it is inevitable that we will see things differently. If we saw it all exactly the same not only would it be weird, but we wouldn't grow much. It is through the clash of trials and differences that we grow. Just as we relate to Christ by laying down our desires to be filled with his, in the body we must do the same – together. But when one or two insist on a personal agenda it can bring the whole church to a stand still. Too many churches today have a church boss. He is usually the biggest giver, volunteers to be the head of committees, and has a following of those who have come under his influence. He knows what he wants and will talk tough to get it. Oh how sad and how detrimental to churches desiring to grow in Christ likeness. Still God is at work trying to raise up men who will stand up to the person in a Christ-like way, men who will lovingly and in the Spirit say what needs to be said. The problem exists because too many men have weak spiritual lives and are too flabby in the word to carry conviction. Some are too afraid of confrontation. Confrontation is a good thing when it is done in the Spirit. Matthew 23 is confrontation from Jesus that spoke to the heart of the Pharisees, challenging them to look at the heart of their religiosity and repent. That took love enough to speak the truth and face rejection and persecution.

Every time I heard of a church that seemed to have it all together, when I talked to individuals I found that was not at all the case. So then what are we to do? We must do what we are to do in our daily relationships, in our differences in convictions, -seek the mind of the LORD. Where does He want us to worship? What is important enough to have you look for another church? The basics of who Jesus is and what He has done – most definitely – for you must have that to have a gathering of believers around Him. But what else should give you reason to look for another place? I think beyond that basic framework the fundamentals of our faith we should be in submission to the Spirit. Who can make a list that would apply to everyone in every situation? There is such diversity in the church today and so many factions but Jesus is the One that makes us one.

What we should not leave a fellowship over is personal taste. If I don't like a person, a style, a procedure, if an individual offends me, I should grow in Christ, not leave. If there are doctrines I don't agree with, I must decide how fundamental those doctrines are. Can I still gather around Jesus and worship? Calvinist, Armenian, pretrib, post, dichotamist, trichotamist, who cares as long as Jesus is your Lord and Savior and it is Him that we have come to worship. Don't allow yourself to be personally offended because someone does not share your opinion. Listen, and try to understand – knowing you have been wrong before and could be again. Keep an open mind within the boundary of Scripture. Thank God for differences that help us learn to get along when we don't agree. We still have the same Savior. Jesus said we should do more than get along, we should love. Don't pack it up unless the LORD leads you as clearly to move on as He did when He led you there.

If you think it is not deep enough for you, you have missed the Holy Spirit. He is the one that makes it deep and illuminates the word. I have heard some horrendous preaching and yet seen people blessed. I have done some horrendous preaching and yet seen people hear from the Lord. Isn't it amazing? There are times when I feel terrible about the message and afterwards someone comments on how it was one of the best messages they'd heard in a long time.

If you come to worship, don't let your flesh, or anyone else's stop you and you will meet with Jesus. Are there dead churches? Of course and the Holy Spirit will either keep you there to bring about change or move you on. Wait on Him to direct.

It is Jesus we come to worship. If we are focussed on Him the differences in the little issues will fade into insignificance. Only when each member is focussed on Him can we have any sense of unity. As soon as we turn our eyes on an individual or a doctrine or preference we will have differences. Those are tools in the Lord's hands to teach us humility and to prefer our brothers. Phil 2:1-4 (NIV)¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The letter of Philippians was written to the brothers and sisters in Philippi who were at odds with each other. Euodia and Syntyche were sisters who labored with the Apostle Paul, but they had let pride separate them and gotten upset with each other. Good sisters – Paul even says they contended at his side for the sake of the gospel. Notice Paul doesn't pick sides or lay down the trump of his Apostleship to settle whatever their issue was, but just pleads with them to get along. You are bound to have differences, that is a gift of God to increase your capacity to Jesus – who made himself the servant of all. It gives us a chance to express the life of Jesus in us.

In the Roman epistle it appears there were two fellowships in the same city. It was two large to meet under one roof. See Romans 16:14,15 During the ministry of Watchman Nee in Shanghai there were a number of fellowships that met in homes and church buildings, each small group being led by an elder. When persecution came spies were sent to the meetings. Watchmen Nee told the parable of the glass. He said if you take glass and smash it, it will become many small pieces. Some can be broken again, but all the small pieces are still glass. The believers understood that even though they could not meet in large groups, to corporately worship you only need two or three believers. The spies thought he was babbling.

That was quite a change in style, in the organization that the brothers had established, but it is the way the church would survive and go on even under the watchful eye of the government. If church organizations are outlawed, will you have church? Now we are getting down to what it really is to have church: believer with believer bowing to worship the living Lord Jesus, trying to see him more clearly together, discerning his leading together, encouraging each other. That is why we should gather. I pray that each Sunday before you come you will have that heart, "I'm going to worship my Lord with my

brothers and sisters! I know He will speak through them in their testimonies and experiences. What will the Spirit speak to me this morning and what would He have me share of our walk together this week?"

I am afraid that with many corporate worship is optional. If persecution came and banned gatherings they would simply quit meeting. Sheep gather in flocks. Body parts are meant to be united to a body. A family is meant to be a unite. The parts of a house are connected one to another. These are the pictures Jesus used to describe his church (called out ones). The very word implies called out to an assembly. It may be two or three, but that is where Jesus is.

This morning I want you to consider what we are doing. We have structure. I like the way we meet but this style can come or go. We have patterns and style which both can change. But we are here to worship Jesus. That is all that really matters, and that is what cannot change. That is why I ask you what He has shown you this week. That is why we sing. That is why we have communion. That is why we meet at all. We belong together. If the Lord leads you to another fellowship in this city, that is His call, not yours, not mine, but the Great Shepherd's who knows where you will best grow up into his likeness. Be aware that He is not leading us to a perfect place but to a place where we can be perfected. Chink chink chink – that is not a comfortable sound, but it is an encouraging sound. It is the sound of struggles in fellowship conforming me, transforming me, to His image. Will you say, "Hammer away, Lord Jesus."

I think you see how the last week's message and this one go together. We need to value the difficulties for what they produce in our lives. We need to see the hand of the Lord in them, to count it all joy, not run or ask for immediate solution. Look to your heart and see what the LORD is working on there. Go to his Word and see where your image is not conformed to his. "Hammer away, Lord Jesus." We rejoice in your faithfulness to work on us.

Zech 6:12-13 (NIV)¹² Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD.¹³ It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.'

King Jesus is building the Temple – it's a mess, but He is the master Craftsman. The work will be completed – there will be harmony between his reigning Supreme (the organization and rule) and his priestly work (spiritual life). Let's trust Him to build as He sees fit and complete it in his time.