

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA



"Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people." -Isaiah 62:10

"Set ye up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet..." -Jeremiah 51:27

God establishes a group of believers in any given community so as to make Christ known through His chosen vessel, the local church. In essence, to make Christ known is to bring the Word of God alive in time. Or, in other words, to allow Jesus to do as He would do, to walk as He would walk, and to say what He would say through the yielded and sanctified vessel of the body of Christ. We may ask, how is this accomplished? Only as true, born-again believers come together in unity, embrace the cross, deny themselves, and purpose to fulfill the vision of God is this end realized.

Unfortunately, many suppose the local church is a place where they occasionally attend services to fulfill their felt needs. Though, there is some truth to this, God intended it to be so much more. The local church is God's chosen and ordained vehicle to raise up disciples. Thus, it is imperative that we understand our calling to the local church.

1 Corinthians 12:18 But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

As we come together, wherever God has planted us, we realize our high and holy calling both individually and corporately. We see this life is to be a holy life. Anything less than a Biblical life cannot be described as a pure display of Jesus. And anything short of a manifestation of Christ can only be defined as dead religion. Religion, in essence, is a mere shell of true, heartfelt, vibrant Christianity. Many of us have seen and experienced the curse of religion and we certainly believe God intends for us something beyond the norm. However, being free from religion is far more difficult than discerning religion. Unfortunately, the vast majority of what refers to itself as Christianity in America, is little more than dead, formal religion. Current statistics reveal that...

- Only a tiny fraction of church members attend all their weekly services.
- Only 27% of professing Christians pay their tithes.
- Surveys reveal the average church-goer prays less than 5 minutes a day.
- The same surveys reveal the average pastor/minister prays less than 7 minutes a day.
- Few believe in the reality of *Hell* or the Biblical conditions to attain *Heaven*.
- Fewer still believe Christ can literally set men free from their sins.
- Only 45% of professing Christians in America believe the world will end as the Bible predicts.

The above statistics expose the vast balance of modern Christendom as nothing more than a gutted, powerless parody of N.T. Christianity.

2 Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Unless we make a conscious effort to contend for the faith and to hold fast to the truth, we will also succumb to this same pitiful standard. The spirit of this age applies incredible pressure upon us to conform to these worldly standards. The following are current religious trends and tendencies that we must not tolerate in our midst.

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA IS PRAYERLESS

Matthew 21:12-14 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Almost every spiritual problem for the Christian can be traced back to prayerlessness (Matt 26:41). Moreover, a mark of the new covenant is an intimate walk with God through a persistent, overcoming, and diligent prayer life (Jn 17:3). Therefore, the ministry of any local church that fails to influence men into deeper communion with God is dysfunctional at best.

“No man is greater than his prayer life.” -Leonard Ravenhill

A spiritual ministry produces spiritual men. A prayerful ministry will influence men to pray. When the local church no longer compels men to seek God, she has lost her way and waxes spiritually inept.

“To neglect prayer is a proof that the life of God in the soul is in deadly sickness and weakness.”
-Andrew Murray

And, no doubt, the prayerful always mourn over the prayerless. In fact, prayerlessness may be the single most grievous condition for the prayerful.

"It would seem that the biggest thing in God's universe is a man who prays. There is only one thing more amazing, that is, that man knowing this, should not pray...Brethren, The crying need of the church today is her laziness after God." -Samuel Chadwick

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA HAS MADE A TRUCE WITH SIN

Amos 5:15 Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.

Contrary to popular theology, God intends for His sanctuary to be a place where sin is unwelcome.

Jude 1:23 ...hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Frequently, the modern pulpit fails to communicate God's hatred for sin. Preachers today present a gospel void of conviction. The gospel prerequisites of godly sorrow and full surrender are often conveniently neglected. There is much reformation, but little repentance. Many may come to our altars, but I fear few are coming to Calvary. Multitudes sign the rolls of our churches, but how many are actually following Jesus? Consequently, the concept of the "new birth" has been watered down to accommodate the shallow spiritual experiences that abound. Sin is expected, even pampered. Church discipline is rarely if ever practiced. Most churches resign themselves congregations filled with religious hypocrites and tares. If the pastor denounces sin he is often accused of lacking love. Few seem to realize that true spiritual leadership demands constant confrontation, provocation, and conflict. A man who is not constantly rejuvenated by the Spirit of God cannot maintain the strength to resist the perpetual pressure to relax.

"Satan does not fear the brilliant preacher. He will compromise the work and give the preacher full possession of his study and great ability and reputation in the pulpit, if he, as a pastor, will let the people alone. Satan is well content to let Paul be the preacher if Satan can be the pastor." -E.M. Bounds

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA IS HIGHLY UNFAITHFUL

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

Faithful: (Greek) *pis-tos'*, Trustworthy; overflowing with faith.

The Church, built through faith in Jesus Christ, should show evidence of faithfulness. Faithfulness is a product of true faith. If you want to find faithfulness, of all places you ought to be able to find it among a people of faith. In the average church, members are more faithful to their secular jobs than to God's purposes for them in the kingdom. People disesteem the house of God and they rarely attend all the services that their church has scheduled. Professing Christians today are generally uninvolved and uncommitted. It is difficult to find anyone you can count on.

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA LACKS SPIRITUAL HUNGER

Proverbs 27:7 The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.

There is little appetite for the pure Word of God. More often than not, people want to be entertained and amused. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, their soul loathes the manna from heaven. Sound doctrine is seen as oppressive, legalistic, and judgmental so the masses cry out for the "positive" and the "upbeat." Hence, it is rare to find anyone who is simply content with ol'fashioned Bible preaching/teaching.

Luke 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God...

It's difficult to hold the attention of today's church for longer than an hour, and you almost have to do spiritual hat tricks to do so. Folks often seem bored with the Word.

Proverbs 26:15 The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth.

Amazingly, its common for people to sleep through sound Bible preaching. This is the ultimate insult, the highest act of disrespect to God, to fall asleep under His Word.

Moreover, this lack of hunger is also evident in the quality of spiritual service.

Proverbs 21:25 The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.

Proverbs 22:13 The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.

In most churches 10% people do 90% of the work. People hate to be asked to do anything. They have, what we call in our church, the bare minimum spirit. People in this hour become wearied with a constant pace of sacrifice. They become grieved is asked to give of their time for ministry.

Luke 10:2 Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few...

Remember, a week consist of 7 twenty-four-hour days. Think about it, if you simply tithed on your free time, apart from necessities...

A week is 7 days x 24 hours = 168 hours - 40 hours work = 128 hours - 56 hours for sleep (8 hours a night) = 72 hours - 14 hours for devotions (2 hours a day) = 58 hours x 10% = 5.8 HOURS A WEEK WE COULD GIVE TO MINISTRY SIMPLY TITHING ON OUR FREE TIME (this is not meant as an absolute standard, only an illustration).

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA IS A SPIRITUALLY DANGEROUS PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY

Neh. 4:14 ...remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

I would be afraid to raise my family in most churches in America. The current doctrines that are taught promote disorder at best, rebellion at worst. Families are divided and authority is often undermined. Children are allowed to run wild, wax disrespectful, and there is little standard for obedience. The teaching on the family is almost exclusively derived from the philosophies of the world. Children are shuffled off to daycare, or worse, public education (Dt 6:7; Eph 6:4), wives work outside the home (Tit 2:5), and the men are blind to the grave spiritual ramifications of this worldly pattern.

Isaiah 3:12 As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.

Order is not only neglected but disorder is often promoted. The pulpit ministry, rather than expose rebellion, often strengthens the deception of obstinate wives and children.

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA MURMURS AND COMPLAINS

Philip. 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings...

Remember, an attribute of the children of Israel in the wilderness was that they murmured about everything.

1 Corinthians 10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

Because carnality is left unchallenged, church-goers in these last days can be found arguing over almost anything. There is nothing submissive or humble about the flesh. The flesh is a war-monger, it's petty, childish, sensual, devilish, and brutal. Hence, rivalries, clicks, and competition all flourish in the professing church. Among professing Christians, an offended spirit is often common, and therefore, murmuring and complaining is the norm, rather than the exception. Consequently, there is often more order and understanding in most barrooms and street gangs than the average church in America.

THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA COULD CARE A LESS ABOUT ONE ANOTHER

John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves...

If you can't find love in the Church where can you find it? People in this hour don't genuinely love one another. How do we know this? Jesus said...

John 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Love can be measured by how much we are willing to sacrifice so others can be strengthened in Jesus. Most are too busy with their own plans to give themselves to the vision of the local church. Hence, independence and selfishness quench the self-sacrificing spirit necessary to fulfill God's plan in the local church. How can we truly minister if we have not forsaken our personal agendas? The Book of Acts says...

Acts 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common...

Acts 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul...

Church-goers today tend to occasionally show up for a service (if it is convenient) and never seek fellowship with others until the next week, or month. This ought not be brethren.

1 John 4:10 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

We must nurture a pure and godly love one for another.

LASTLY, THE AVERAGE CHURCH IN AMERICA IS WISE, DIGNIFIED, AND WIDELY ACCEPTED BY THE WORLD

1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.

To some degree, the spirituality of a Church can be measured by the horror it displays at the word "worldliness." Unfortunately, instead of seeking to be separate from the world, the modern church is searching for its applause. Since numerical growth is the key indicator of success in the minds of many, they invariably are drawn to seek the world's approval. This is a formula for disaster and a mark of shame. When the world accepts the church, the church has lost her testimony.

John 15:19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

While enamored with seeking the world's approval we have lost its ear. We would be wise to find contentment in doing the will of God, even if it meant being branded ignorant, unlearned, and fanatical.

"Never had the Church so much influence over the world as when she had nothing to do with the world!"
-L.E. Maxwell

Let us consecrate ourselves afresh to produce a spirituality that is, at least, above average.

-B.W.

