

## #60 “When Church Goes Bad”

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A grammatical error on the powerpoint, a misquote by the pastor, a blunder by the song leader, food poisoning at the potluck- these are all standard parts of life as a church body, and we can all deal with them, hopefully laughing about them later and not getting angry at one another. Yet there are other things that happen at church that can be tough to get over.

I know of plenty of horror stories within church circles, stories of authoritarianism, manipulation, thievery, lying, fornication, adultery, and so on. I have been in church long enough to see many professing Christians fall or take advantage of other Christians. To be certain, the church has wolves in sheep's clothing that we need to be wary of. Yet, other times, truly godly men and women sin grossly and harm themselves and others. Bad things happen to church people, and the church is not free from pain, sin, and hardship...not in this life, not while Christians still have the flesh to deal with and not while Satan makes war upon the saints. Christians do struggle, and the church is not always a happy place. The issue becomes what we do once we have seen, recognized, or experienced this reality.

Some Christians write off the church, choosing not to assemble themselves together, a blatant violation of Scripture (Hebrews 10:24-25). Sure, there are cases where for doctrinal reasons it might be tough or even impossible to find fellowship in a certain locale, but generally speaking there is no reason not to associate with true brothers and sisters in Christ. We need the encouragement and edification that such true fellowship provides. So giving up on church is not a biblical answer.

Another false response is to go through the motions of church involvement but to retain a highly pessimistic, bitter attitude on the inside towards church and toward Christians. This type of individual tends to believe that church is fundamentally flawed because of inherent, unavoidable evil in the church. He misses the reality that it is indeed possible for church to be a great place, a place of healing, warmth, comfort, encouragement, and edification. The early church as recorded in Acts was all of these things, and because they were healthy, mature, and evangelistic without hypocrisy, many conversions were seen as well (Acts 2:41-47). Two of the seven churches in the first few chapters of Revelation were healthy as well, passing a direct inspection from God Himself. Indeed, it is possible, desirable, and even expected that the church be healthy. We don't have an excuse as if we can't help overcome our flesh. God has given us in Christ all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3); thus, we are without excuse when church goes bad. We must confess sin, forgive sin, and move on according to God's Word, Christlike love, and sound doctrine. The church can be healed, restored, and revived such that it can become a place of healing for others. Even those of us who have been hurt by the church can become those who are used of God as His church to heal others

spiritually. Such is the grace of God. *We dare not write off the power of God because of the failures of man.*

Still another response is to get irritated with the stifling power of sin in the church and to choose one of Satan's methods to find "success" in the church rather than turning back to God. The result can be an appearance of success without faithfulness to God's Word, something God does not delight in or truly bless. God calls upon the church to be holy and to obey His Word. If it does so, it should expect to be used of God. If not, it can expect to have its lampstand removed (e.g. Revelation 2:5), thereby maybe still existing but without the power and blessing of God. The answer is always and only for the church to repent, to be humble, and to exalt Christ above all else by revering Him and trembling before His Word (Isaiah 66:2) if it wants to see the hand of God move and work (see also 2 Chronicles 7:14). No other way will do it. Christ is sufficient, and His Word is sufficient. We must rely upon the means, power, and resources which God has ordained to do His work. Any other means or reliance is not of God but of the devil. Not surprisingly then, an alliance with the devil is not the answer to church gone bad.

We must not give up on the church, for the church can do great good, and such is God's plan (Matthew 5:16). I must say that I love the church. I have seen glimpses of Christ at work powerfully and awesomely through His church. I have seen people reborn as they have been confronted with the Word of God. I have seen people grow as they started digging into the Bible with simple faith. I have seen lives changed from bondage to sin and various addictions such that these individuals go on to fruitful service for the Lord. I have experienced love, comfort, care, and compassion. I have seen God answer prayer and move on the behalf of those who petitioned Him. So, despite the bad that we might have experienced or might be experiencing, we must remember that the professing church can be transformed because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we must not give up on the church. We might have to find a different place to fellowship, but we must not give up on the corporate work of God through His people.

Rather than become naysayers or hypocrites, let us do our part to transform the church by faith and obedience to God's Word. We must win the battles for holiness that we face ourselves, and we must serve and encourage others by the Word of God and power of the Spirit to do the same. *The church can only be as healthy as it is holy, and as each individual pursues holiness, the church grows holier.*

No matter what your church experience has been like, God needs you to join hands with other Christians and accomplish His commission. He will provide in His proper timing. May God lead us to conviction, to places of fellowship, and to those of like mind and heart. We need one another, Lord, and we need to serve You as the body. Enable such to become a reality, we pray.