

Discipleship 08

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THE MATTER OF MINISTRY

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

How Much Do We Have to Learn Before We Become Spiritual?

Mentors and Ministries

Part of the spiritual life is to make a connection with those who can supply valuable spiritual understanding and companionship. These are the *joints* that support and nurture us. They are our connections in the body of Christ. Fellowship supplies input to areas of knowledge which will be encouraging, and edifying. When we are born into the kingdom, we must move forward or we will retrograde back to the old life in the world. Here according to most voices of ministry is where one would be encouraged to get connected to a "good" church. This should be a simple fact but it is not.

There are few church bodies of believers who hold more than a traditional evangelical viewpoint. Most are adhering to their own forms and traditions, or doctrines. Often these do not advance the Spiritual life to a significant level of maturity. Once in a church you are expected to "play by their rules." My best advice is to search for the church and set your sights on particular features which will allow you to be discipled and grow not in tradition but in spirituality. If one does nurture spiritual "life" move on until you sense that it is where God would have you. In the mean time if it at all possible, find a fellowship of believers who share a passion for God. In a home fellowship you can grow with others in an informal setting.

God does not discriminate against home meetings. They are apostolic! It is how the "Church" began. It is obvious that formalized Christian ministry is to be found everywhere in one form or another. As I have already described most of these churches or ministries are a manifestation of institutional and traditional religion. The forms and expectation are in conformity to the norms of a Saturday or a Sunday ritual. People support the familiar comfortable routines or rituals and may even add a little to their spiritual knowledge and understanding. At the same time the Kingdom of God is not strongly advanced as it was originally intended.

Churches, struggle to maintain membership so are eager to enhance interest, or involvement. A church may be jealous of their members going astray or getting involved with meetings or activities which are not sponsored by their own fellowship. There was a time when such unfaithfulness could be met by excommunication, but today the usual rebukes from the pulpit are just admonitions or doctrines created out of hand which indicate an obligation to support the local body. Member are ingrained to regard as close to a cardinal sin to consider "church hopping" or being active in any outreaches from other congregations.

This result becomes, in effect, the fruit of division which institutional religion enforces.

The Electronic Church There are many other kinds of ministries we can tune into on radio or TV. They are not local to us. These are media ministries. In most cases they have been launched by men or women who have some special gift of teaching or evangelism or certain personal *charismas* have been able to share their spiritual understandings and insights with any who will watch or listen. Many who

listen appreciate the content of a given message or the style of presentation so we may request their lesson or tape series. Perhaps we think that they have enough clout with God to pray for our special needs. These ministries, sometimes called the "**electronic churches**" are not highly regarded by pulpit ministries.

We hear all kinds of castigation directed toward the names of such ministries, whether Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Robert Schuler, Benny Hinn or countless others who fill the airwaves of radio and television and short wave broadcast channels. In view of practical matters of church survival and management, local preachers and church leaders need to maintain membership and viability. 'Grandma Smith' might write a check to a radio or television evangelist and forgo giving her five dollar donation to the church collection plate. A pastor might make the following remark to parishioners, "Grandma Smith, if you want to support Reverend So and So on TV maybe you should call them when you need a trip to the doctor; or need someone to pray for you if you are sick; or have them officiate your funeral."

What has the Electric Church ministry to offer? Might they be better than some tradition-bound churches which allow so many to languish in their pews around the world? Televangelists usually have some unique strengths and certainly the ability to preach and persuade. There are important matters to consider in choosing any ministry to support whether remote or local.

What do media churches provide for community or edification?

Let's look at some attributes of ministry:

- First and most importantly is the message; Do we hear the correct gospel being taught?
- How much of the appeal of this ministry is performance and dazzling rhetoric which attracts us and how much is a sense of devotion to the truth of the Gospel?
- Does the minister seem to model Jesus Christ? The best mode of discerning a minister or a ministry is to imagine Jesus behaving and saying the things as the evangelist or teacher.
- Is devotion and reverence modeled and portrayed?
- Does the person try to draw attention to themselves through colorful mannerisms?
- Does he seem preoccupied with authority and followings?
- Does the leader indicate as we listen to his messages that he wants influence, control, or worship?
- Does there seem to be more of emphasis on one aspect of the Gospel than another?
- Is it a Gospel of power and wholeness or just continually underscoring sin?
- Is it a Gospel in which we can become partakers of God's life or are we blessed because of our supporting the "Super Ministry of Brother X?" There are some media evangelists who I listen to and support because they have helped to mentor me in understanding the Word of God. I support them because they teach the full Gospel message, (more or less) and believe in the potentialities of becoming children of God, partaking in His Divinity. They teach what we should be taught in the local fellowship or church but are not.
- We need to practice discernment and note any inconsistencies in doctrine which place the teaching outside of norms of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The *Apostles Creed* is recited by many denominations in the context of a worship service, but in spite of this, the content of the Apostle's Creed may hardly be addressed in teaching and preaching in sermons. Based upon denominations which I have belonged to or visited before and after I became a believer, *unbelief and spiritual deadness till characterize most of the churches today even those who recite the Credo!*

Mega-Churches

When a brilliant preacher or evangelist proves his (her) ability to move and edify people they begin to

develop a following. People follow spiritual anointings. They follow men or women who have demonstrated their abilities to impact the lives of others. The largest churches today grow around the giftings of a single person. People are searching for a greater revelation of God. When they see God using an individual they naturally are attracted to that person. Nearly every Christian I know has a natural desire to be in the presence of "anointed" preaching. Mega-churches are built around mega-men. I believe there are in America today well over a hundred such mega-churches. I have attended a few and have seen others via telecasts and cable networks.

Positives Associated with Mega-Ministries

There are both negatives and positives in following this kind of ministry. A few positives: God shows favor to his servant by anointing him (her) just as God anointed Jesus and the Apostles for ministry. God's favor seems to indicate his approval to bring forth a particular gift or understanding to the body. God's approval indicates that he foreknows that many will be touched and blessed by this individual. God allows a such a man or woman with special abilities to reach more people with a Gospel message they would ordinarily hear or be exposed to. Many are born again through the media ministers. If one should choose to go to a church attended by multiple thousands you might enjoy the anonymity of blending into the masses.

Negatives Associated with Mega-Ministries

The gifted minister may be persuasive or charismatic in purely human terms, without necessarily walking in a divine anointing. The media evangelist may be preaching a partial or flawed gospel, a non-Christian gospel or simply traditionalism. There is no way for the novice seeker to know whether this person teaches true doctrine or not except by natural reasoning or mental judgment. There is a temptation for the minister to become puffed up in mind and think himself to be great. There is a tendency to focus on money and power. Though there may be concepts, doctrines and information imparted there is a serious limitation for immediate fellowship. To deal with this home fellowships or satellite congregations are set up to allow blessings of human interaction and loving community. Recipients of any ministry need intimacy and a human touch. *It is not good for man to be alone.* Ultimately the spiritual life is more than the acquisition of information about God.

Those who attend services in a mega church are committed to be audience or onlookers. This is a terrible loss and limitation.

But the most serious limitation is that individual believers are never really trusted or free to lead when they have achieved revelation or status in God's eyes. Typically, they are told that they must be submitted to a greater ministerial authority who must oversee.

An Impression of Mega-churches

I have attended worship services in several 'average size' mega-churches with bodies in attendance numbering 2 or 3 thousand. Some great churches have numbers approaching 10 thousand and those with 10 thousand aspire to 50 thousand. While there was brilliant teaching and preaching and outstanding musical worship, performance; one could not help but feel that those in attendance came mainly to view the show or to hear the inspired address of the mega-minister. What I saw was an enterprise in which each person was committed to make the mega-church even more of a mega-church. Something was missing. There was little or no intimacy between the "pastor" and the individual members. Individuals may have known and recognized a handful of people in the auditorium but they did not seek each other out for closeness, sharing, breaking of bread or lingering in the afterglow of God's presence. It seemed that the super Christians who were attending the super church quickly rushed home to resume life in whatever form life that awaited outside of church.

What is the Glorious Church?

The Roman Catholic empire numbers in tens of millions.

Is this the glorious church?

The issue of a glorious church may well be addressed in the context of the mega-church. There is evidence that many ministries of mega-churches teach an emphasis of the gospel that introduces the concept of a "glorious church" where the church is a dynamic economic and political force in the earth as well as a power to renovate society as well.

See the doctrine of Kingdom Theology. In secular societies, Christians have been named the bane of society because of their conservative and fundamental viewpoints but quite the opposite is true. The true Spirit of Christianity is compassion, forgiveness, and understanding. Moral precepts include personal honor and righteousness, integrity and responsibility; kindness, mutual support and family stability. Though the world does not like to recognize sin and unrighteous behavior as anything other than a "choice," Christians see that we humans *all share* alike, having a need for a redeemer along with the essential need of being hopelessly lost until God extends mercy upon our lives. In recent decades, Christians were too long absent and silenced from the counsel of social values and political ideas. In the present hour it is surely appropriate for those who have so much cause to rejoice and give voice to the life-changing testimony in the arena of public opinion. Men and women of integrity need to stand up publicly and politically and exercise their rights on behalf of issues of righteousness.

Yet, I believe that ultimately the glorious church does not extend to exert itself in empire or political power. Why? The spiritual life is essentially a non secular and a non materialistic life. Social or political activism may be a Godly calling in some. Those who follow a leading to become apologists for social and political issues it should be presumed have their own foundations in correct doctrine and not equate activism with the gospel. The emphasis of the Christian life can not be focused too strongly upon the things which are social, political, or economic at the expense of Spiritual relationships. These are not lines that I draw, but lines that the Holy Spirit has drawn. These parameters have been in place since Jesus spoke these words, "My kingdom is not of this world," and "You are not of the world." (*John 18:36; John 15:19*) The nature and operation of the world is contrary to God's ways and I do not look for this situation to change until Jesus returns to set up an unending righteous Kingdom. Just how far into the future this event will occur is open to debate, there have been hundreds of book titles addressing it but the Bible itself has "sealed up" many of the answers and insights into the "second coming" of Jesus Christ. This is another area of scholarship.

What is the glorious church then?

Does this "glory" refer to the size, influence and authority of mega-church to rule upon the earth; does glory refer walking in the knowledge of truth; does it refer to all of the above or none of the above? Does the glorious church refer to the whole of the body universal or does it refer to the individual within a blended multitude who somehow remains separate, pure and faithful in the middle of a reprobate generation of spiritual pretenders and flaccid, Luke warm church goers? Church as empire is not a new idea. It was in fact the goal of the early church since Constantine's day, both in Rome and in Constantinople, where power, influence, authority and might married the political and the religious. For a time church membership and theological belief was forced upon the whole world. A person was then a Christian because of political decree and not by the grace of God and such ordinances do nothing to enhance the life and promises of the Gospel. In such an empire men were exalted who held the power of life and death over others; who acted as spiritual judges over others; who were mediators between God and man and who rewarded themselves with worldly luxuries while being exalted to the point of worship in their offices.

Meanwhile, certain men lust for power, clamoring for recognition and striving to achieve self exaltation. They lift and promote their own names as someone great, "as the great power of God." Acts 8:10) No, I do not think this is the Glorious church. The true glory remains shrouded with humility. This cloud of glory can only be penetrated with meekness, self-effacement and kindly service. Success which comes from such is contrary to the apostolic foundations of the Gospel which we need to follow.

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