

***"We are in danger of forgetting truths for which previous generations gave their lives."*** Bishop Stephen Bradley

Are our churches changing the world, or is the world changing our churches?

If Martin Luther, John Calvin, R. C. Ryle, D. L. Moody or Charles Spurgeon were to walk into our Sunday morning service, what would they think? Would they be shocked at the type of clothes worn? Would they be able to recognise any of the great hymns of the Faith, or have drums and choruses taken over in your congregation?

What would they think of the preaching? Is the Word of God faithfully expounded? Or has anti-nomianism and existentialism taken over? Would they hear the Faith once delivered unto the saints or a cheap grace and easy believism? Would they find worship or worldliness? Spirituality or sensationalism? Education or entertainment? Would they find a congregation or an audience?

Were some of these 19<sup>th</sup> Century believers to visit our church would they find us praying or playing?

Over a century ago General Booth of the Salvation Army warned that a time may come when churches will preach a Saviour without a cross, salvation without repentance, heaven without hell and Christianity without holiness.

When a good friend who had survived the severe persecution behind the Iron Curtain in Romania visited South Africa I asked him what he thought of our churches. Awkwardly, he responded that we had a lot of programmes, but he didn't see much power. This same brother commented that in Eastern Europe they did not count the number of members by who attended the Sunday morning service, but by who attended the Bible study and prayer meeting. By that accounting, many of our largest churches have few who would qualify as members by the definition of our friends in Eastern Europe.

Friends from Sudan and Eastern Europe have expressed their shock at how many of the "men" in Western congregations have long hair, pony tails and earrings. They have also expressed their shock at the attire, and lack of attire, of many women in Western churches, even wearing the belly rings and nose studs which they had associated with paganism. From the perspective of many missionaries and persecuted Christians, a significant percentage of the Western churches seem shallow, superficial, self-centred and materialistic.

Numerous pastors have commented to me on their frustration over the general lack of commitment evidenced by many church members and adherents. Many of today's churchgoers seem more distracted, less committed and less accountable. Instead of commitment and accountability wild-geese-member-migration seems more common. Many Christians seem aimless and drifting, more committed to reading the newspaper every day than the Bible, and more dedicated to watching TV than to witnessing for Christ and winning their world.

Several pastors have commented to me recently of their frustration over a general apathy and lethargy in their congregations especially with regard to missions. We agreed that missions is an overflow of worship. Biblically the church's first priority is worship. Missions exist because not everyone worships. The Great Commission must be our supreme ambition, because our great God and loving Saviour deserves all honour, glory and worship. A Church that is truly worshipping the Lord will be involved in missions. When a congregation is apathetic and half-hearted about missions, it is a symptom of a church that is also lukewarm in its worship.

Biblically, the Church is the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), and Christ is the Head (Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18). The Church is a building, a temple (1 Corinthians 3:9, 16) and Christ is both the Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20) and the Builder (Matthew 16:18). The Church is the bride (Revelation 21:2) and Christ is the Groom (John 3:29). The Church is to be the branches of the Vine, but Christ is the Vine (John 15:5). The Church is to be the flock (Luke 12:32) and Christ is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11).

The Church is to be "***a house of prayer for all nations***", the Body and bride of Christ, a temple of worship,  
***disciples teaching obedience***  
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***making***

The Church is to be changing lives, strengthening families, and transforming communities. The Church is to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, a witness to the community,

self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. The whole Church taking the whole Gospel to the whole world.

*"Each one win one, each one bring one".*

For the Church to fulfill its mission, it needs to be involved in evangelism and discipleship, preaching and teaching, nurture and worship, prayer and fellowship. Members need to be committed to their local congregation and accountable to its leadership. This will require tithing to the local church, participating in the Bible studies and prayer meetings, as well as Sunday morning worship.

In order to make the most of our local church, and to put first things first, we need to protect our Sundays as a Day of rest and a Day of worship, and reject TV, daily newspapers and the world's music as worldly distractions and time wasters.

The various sacraments and ordinances of the Church are an important part of the Church's mission and witness: baptism testifying to the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life; the Lord's Supper illustrating the atonement of Christ; the marriage service which points to families as the basic building block of society; and funerals emphasising the importance of being prepared for eternity and the Day of Judgement, because *"it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the Judgement"*  
Hebrews 9:27.

The qualifications of Church leaders is made clear in Acts 6:2-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-16. We need to carefully examine our lives in the light of these passages.

There is an urgent need to Reform our churches, to bring all aspects of our congregational and personal life in line with the Word of God. We cannot allow the Great Commission to be *"the great omission"*

in our local churches. Missions are the very lifeblood of the Church. We exist to be a house of prayer for all nations, making disciples, teaching obedience to all things the Lord has commanded. The last Command of Christ must be our first concern. We cannot afford to be ignorant of our history, or selective in the use of Scripture.

*"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God. we will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word."*

Acts 6:2-4.

We need to be "**full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**" Acts 6:5.

And our church ought to be "**.a house of prayer for all nations**" Mark 11:17.