

The Church is a Body of Strangers

Hey, how many of you guys heard the saying, “Crime does not pay”? We all know that one, right? Of course we have. **Why?** Because committing a crime’s not only unbiblical, it’s a dumb, right? Absolutely! But that’s right! For those of you who don’t believe me, I’m here to help you out. I’m going to share with you some recent criminal behavior and you tell me if they weren’t a few bricks short of a load.

1. Two men tried to pull the front off an ATM machine by running a chain from the machine to the bumper of their pickup truck. But instead of pulling off the front panel the machine, the machine pulled off the bumper on their truck. So naturally, they got scared and left the scene leaving behind their bumper, which guess what it still had on it? Their license plate number!
2. One day, a company called “Guns For Hire” which stages gunfights for Western movies got a call from a 47 year old woman, who wanted to have her husband killed. That’s right! She got 4-1/2 years in jail.
3. A man walked into a Circle-K and put a \$20 bill on the counter and asked for change. But when the clerk opened the cash drawer, the man pulled a gun and asked for all the cash in the register. So the man took the cash from the clerk and fled leaving the \$20 bill on the counter. How much cash did he get the drawer? \$15 dollars!
4. Charged with speeding, a man from Florida man made his appearance in court. Though he was going 90 in a 25mph zone, the man pleaded innocent. Why? Because, as he told the judge, he had taken a laxative and was obviously in a rush to get home.
5. An elderly woman just left the store when upon returning to her vehicle, she found four strange males sitting in her car. So being

frightened, the woman dropped her shopping bags and drew her handgun. She told the men that if they did not get out of the car, she would shoot them. So the four men ran off quickly, whereupon the lady got into the car but soon discovered her key wouldn't fit. And that's when she realized her car was the identical one parked a few spaces down. So she drove to the police station to report story where the officer on duty, laughing hysterically, pointed to the other end of the counter where four pale men were reporting a car hijacking by a mean old lady with a gun.

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say that was some **pretty dumb criminal behavior**, how about you? But folks, believe it or not, did you know I've discovered some criminal behavior even dumber than that? And get this! It's actually being done by Christians. And can anybody guess what dumb criminal behavior that might be? Hey, that's right! It's when we act like we've got **practical amnesia!** Talk about dumb criminal behavior!

Oh, we say we know who we are as the Church, but half the time, with our lips and with our lives, we act like we've forgotten who we are. And it's not only detrimental in our walk with Christ. It keeps others from believing in Christ. Therefore, to avoid this **atrocious** of Christian's living like they got practical amnesia by not knowing who they are, we're going to continue our study from the Word of God on the people of God entitled, **“Will the REAL Church Please Stand Up?”**

And we've already seen the **first thing** we need to know about the Church if we're going to stop acting like we've got practical amnesia is that

the Church is the **Body of Christ**. The **second thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of Brides**. The **third thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of One**. The **fourth thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of Hope**. The **fifth thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of Joy**. The **sixth thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of Love**. And last time we saw the **seventh thing** we need to know is that the Church is a **Body of Peace**. And there we saw, believe it or not, how the American Church is actually behaving peaceless when the Bible says we should be peaceful. **Why?** Because we've forgotten how to be **confident in God, content in God**, and even **courageous in God**. And because of that, we're not only ceasing to be a Body of Peace, we're actually turning into a Body of **fearful, worried, stressed-out people**. And I don't think that's the kind of Church Jesus came to die for, how about you?

But people, believe it or not, did you know that's not the only thing we need to know about the Church if we're going to stop acting like we got practical amnesia? The **eighth thing** we need to know is **The Church is a Body of Strangers**. But hey, don't take my word for it. Let's listen to God's.

Hebrews 11:8-16 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob,

who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance.

And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

Now folks, according to our text, the Bible is clear. The reason why Abraham lived in tents and roamed around all his life wasn't because he couldn't find a decent house to buy. No! What did the text say? He lived as a stranger on earth because he knew his real home wasn't on this earth, right? It was in heaven. **Therefore**, God was not ashamed to be called his God, right? And how many of you would like God to say that about you?

And here's my point. Surely, we all know this, right? I mean, surely every Christian who's ever lived knows that the Church is to be a **Body of Strangers**, where people look at us and say, “Wow! Now there's a group of people who don't belong to this world. I mean, look at them. They are so strange! It's almost as if they've got something better to live for.” **Surely we**

know that, right? Well, you'd think so, but we've got some problems.

Why? Because if you look at most Churches it doesn't look like we're strangers living for the things of heaven. Are you kidding! It looks like we've been seduced to live for this earth!

So why in the world would Christians **live for this earth** when the Bible says we should **be strangers living for heaven**? Hey, great question. I'm glad you asked. It's pretty simple. The **first reason** why we're no longer strangers living for heaven is because we've been tricked into **Exchanging God's Dream for the American Dream**.

1 Corinthians 9:22-25 "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."

Now folks, according to our text, the Bible is clear. Paul became all things to all men and did whatever he had to do, just so he could do what? To share the gospel with everyone he met, right? **And why did he do it?** Did he do it because his Pastor told him to? Did he do it because his buddies were pressuring him into it? Did he do it because he was filling some sort of legalistic Christian quota? No! What did the text say? He did it to get a crown or reward that lasted forever, right? **Why?** Because he was fulfilling

God's purpose or dream for his life, which by the way is His dream for all Christians. That is, to share the gospel with as many people as possible before we get to heaven.

And people, **the point is this**. Surely the American Church knows this, right? I mean, surely we know that this world is a ticking time bomb that's one day going to blow up, right? And therefore we need to try to save as many people as we can before it's too late, right? People are you kidding? Let's be honest! We don't live for God's dream. We live for the American dream. We don't live in hopes to take others with us to retire in heaven! We live in hopes to retire here on earth!

But you might be thinking, "Well hey, wait a second. Aren't we supposed to be wise stewards and provide for our financial future the best as we can?" Of course we are people. But not at the expense of not taking the time to share the gospel! Not if our only concern is save and invest in the stock market instead of investing in saving people from hell! And besides people, have you ever stopped to think about what this American dream really is? In case you haven't, let me define it for you.

"Start studying when you're about seven years old, real hard. Then grow up and get a good job. Then from then on, get up at dawn every day, flatter your boss, crush your competition, and climb over backs of co-workers. Be the last one to leave every night. Squirrel away every cent. Avoid having a nervous breakdown and a premature heart attack and don't forget to get a

face lift. Do this every day for thirty years, holidays and weekends included and by the time you're ready to retire you might have your money.”

And folks, I don't know about you, but I **think the point is obvious**.

When you define it for what it is, in comparison to God's dream, the so-called American Dream is pretty stupid, don't you think? I mean stop and think about it. Who in their right mind would invest all their time and money in a world that is **not only not their true home** but is one day destined to blow up? I mean, **isn't that strange?** Of course it is, people! And that's why God has called us to do whatever it takes like the Apostle Paul to save people from this dying world. **Why?** So one day they can join us in the **ultimate retirement home**, a place called heaven! People, when are we going to learn that the so-called American dream is nothing but a hellish trap that keeps us from saving others from hell! I didn't say that, this guy did!

“One day Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was speaking at a meeting in America after being exiled from Romania. And while he was there, he manage to endure fourteen years of a brutal imprisonment, languishing in slave labor camps, and watched several of his friends being killed for being Christians. And when the meeting ended, one of the people there asked him, ‘Pastor, why is it that we don't have to deal with Communism here in America?’

Well, one would have expected him to say, ‘It's because of your national heritage! Or it's because you haven't built or accepted a Communist government. Or because there are too many believers in your country to allow such a thing to happen.’

Yes, he could have responded like that and to a great extent, he would have been correct. But that was not his answer. Instead he replied, ‘You don't have Communism here; you have something far worse. You have materialism!’”

Now folks, why is it that a Christian from Communistic Russia can see dangers of materialism, but we in the American Church can't? I mean, don't you find it **strange**?

And people, **the point is this**. If you don't want to **live God's dream and instead live for the American dream**, I guess that's your choice. But what you need to know is it doesn't stop there! It's not only a stupid thing to do in your walk with Christ. It's a stumbling block for someone coming to Christ. **Why?** Because it's a no-brainer people! Think about it from the non-Christians point of view. If retirement on earth is better than retirement in heaven, then why would I want to go there? Maybe heaven is here on earth? How many of you have heard that before? Gee, I wonder where they're getting it from?

Oh, but that's not all. The **second reason** why we're no longer strangers living for heaven is because we've been tricked into **Exchanging Treasures in Heaven for Trash on Earth**.

1 John 2:15-17 "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."

Now folks, according to our text, the Bible is clear. If you and I want to demonstrate that we **really love God**, what do we got to do? We not only start taking others with us to heaven, we what? We stop longing for the things of this world, right? **Why?** Because the things of this world are not only catering to our sinful flesh, they're nothing but trash! They cannot and will not last forever, right?

And people, **the point is this**. Surely the American Church knows this, right? I mean, surely we know we need to spend our time storing up treasure in heaven because one day all we've accumulated on earth will be burned up like trash, right? People are you kidding? Let's be honest! We don't live for treasure in heaven. We live for trash on earth. We don't get excited about our glorious surroundings in heaven! We get excited about the grand opening of a Home Depot!

But you might be thinking, "What's wrong with having a few nice things in life. I mean, doesn't God want His children to enjoy life a little?" Of course He does people. But not at the expense of loving created things more than the Creator. Not if our only concern is to get more stuff instead of getting somebody saved! Besides people, have you ever thought stopped to think about how the average person lives just so they could get this trash on earth? Well, in case you haven't, let me define it for you.

“Our so-called American way of life is based upon people who are ready to spend money they don't have to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't know and who in the end, are people who don't care. And the tragedy of all this is that it takes a lot of money to buy all of these things that nobody needs, and in order to get that money most of us neglect what is really important. We don't have time for meaningful relationships.”

And might I add, “We don't have time to share the gospel.” **And people, this is why** when you define it for what it is, living for trash on earth is pretty stupid, don't you think? I mean stop and think about it. Who in their right mind would invest all their time and money in things that are one day destined to become trash? I mean, **isn't that strange?** Of course it is, people! But that's right! If you don't want to believe me, then maybe you should listen to this guy.

“E. Stanley Jones, talks about a fictional person who lived out a fantasy life. And all he had to do was think of it and poof! it happened. So this man, in a moment of time, sticks his hands in his pockets and leans back and imagines a mansion and poof! he has a fifteen-bedroom mansion, three stories with servants instantly available to wait upon his every need.

So he thought, ‘Why, a place like that needs several fine cars.’ So he again closes his eyes and imagines the driveway full of the finest wheels money can buy. And poof! There are several of the best vehicles instantly brought before his eyes. He is free to drive them himself or sit way back in the limousine with that Mafia glass wrapped around the rear, and have the chauffeur drive him wherever he wishes.

But soon there's no other place to travel so he comes back home and wishes for a sumptuous meal and poof! There's a meal in front of him with all of its mouth-watering aromas and beauty—which he eats alone.

And yet, there was something more he needed to find, happiness. Finally, he grows so terribly bored and unchallenged that he whispers to one of the

attendants, ‘I want to get out of this. I want to create some things again. I’d rather be in hell than be here.’

To which one of the servants replies quietly, ‘Where do you think you are?’”

People God, when are we going to learn that living for the temporary things on earth not only leads to a hellish life, but **once again** it distracts from showing others how to get eternal life.

And people, **the point is this**. If you don’t want to **live for treasure in heaven and instead live for trash on earth**, I guess that’s your choice. But what you need to know is it doesn’t stop there! It’s not only a stupid thing to do in your walk with Christ. It’s a stumbling block for someone coming to Christ. **Why?** Because it’s a no-brainer people! Think about it from the non-Christians point of view. If trash on earth is better than the treasure of heaven, then why would I want to go there? Maybe heaven is here on earth? How many of you have heard that before? Gee, I wonder where they’re getting it from?

Oh, but that’s not all. The **third reason** why we’re no longer strangers living for heaven is because we’ve been tricked into **Exchanging a Heavenly Reward for a Hellish Rat Race**.

Revelation 14:9,10,11,13 “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink of the wine of God’s fury. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, Write: Blessed are the dead who die

in the Lord from now on. They will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

Now folks, according to our text, the Bible is clear. If people worship the antichrist and his satanic world system, what do they get? They not only get God’s wrath and torment but **they get no rest** for how long? Forever, right? But to those who give their lives to Christ and live for Him **in the midst of this wicked world**, what do they get? They not only get God’s blessing and rest, but they get to do so for how long? Forever!

And people, **the point is this**. Surely the American Church knows this, right? I mean, surely we know that if we live for this satanically inspired world system, we’re not only going to miss out on God’s rest but we’re going to end up restless, right? People are you kidding? Let’s be honest! We don’t live for God’s rest in heaven, let alone on this earth. We live for a hellish rat race here on earth. And for those of you who don’t think we do, let me share this description of the so-called rat race life and you tell me if this isn’t how the average person lives today, **even Christians**.

“This century’s mad dash of innovation has produced the most frantic human era ever. We phone. We fax. We page. We e-mail. We race from one end of life to the other, rarely glancing over our shoulders.

Technology, mass media and a desire to do more, do it better and do it yesterday have turned us into a world of hurriers. Stop and smell the roses? No more. Instead, we have a world of 7-day diets, 24-hour news channels, 1-hour photo, 30-minute pizza delivery, 10-minute facials, 2-minute warnings, and Minute Rice.

Fast food. Fast computers. Fast cars in fast lanes. VCRs with 5 fast-forward settings. Sound bites and the rat race and instant coffee. Get rich quick. Live fast, die young, leave a good-looking corpse. Run on empty. Just do it.

Places to go, people to meet, planners to fill, files to download, bills to pay, planes to catch, frozen dinners to nuke, web sites to surf, kids to pick up, stress to manage, and speeding tickets to pay.”

Now folks, I don't know about you, but I'd say when you look at it for what it is, the rat race is not only pretty restless, it's pretty stupid, don't you think?

But you might be thinking, “Now wait a minute. You're being a little too harsh here. I mean, yeah okay, so I live for a retirement on earth more than a retirement in heaven and I live for things on earth more than treasure in heaven, and yeah so I get a little restless living the rat race, but so what! Everyone does it. What's the big deal?” Big deal? I'll tell you what the big deal is. When you and I as Christians live like this, what are we doing?

Believe it or not, we're giving the impression that the Church is a **bunch of mentally handicapped people!** I didn't say that, this guy did!

“My brother Kevin thinks that God lives under his bed. At least that's what I heard him say one night. He was praying out loud in his dark bedroom, and I stopped outside his door to listen. ‘Are you there, God?’ he said. ‘Where are you? Oh, I see. Under the bed.’ And after this, I giggled and went off to my own room.

And it was there I began to ponder Kevin's unique perspective in life. He was born thirty years ago, mentally disabled as a result of difficulties during labor. I began to realize for the first time the different world Kevin lives in.

I don't think Kevin knows anything exists outside his world. He doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple. He will never know the entanglements of wealth or power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears or what kind of food he eats. In fact, he recognizes no differences in people and he treats each one like a friend.

His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they might not be. He simply trusts God. And when he comes to Christ, he comes as a child. Kevin seems to know God – to really be friends with Him in a way that is difficult for an ‘educated’ person to grasp. God seems like his closest companion.

And that’s why in my moments of doubt and frustrations in my walk with God I actually begin to envy Kevin’s simple faith. And it is there I realize that maybe Kevin’s not the one with the handicap – maybe it’s me.”

People of God, when are we ever going to learn. God not only has a better plan for our lives, He’s got a better place for our lives. It’s called heaven and it’s **not here on earth!** And people I’m telling you, the longer we live like this, we’re not only ceasing to be a Body of Strangers, we’re acting like a Body of Mentally Handicapped people! **No wonder people don’t take us seriously when we talk about heaven!**

And people, that’s why if we can’t stop **playing Church** instead of being the Church then maybe it’s time to **get out of the Church? Why?** Because being a Christian is not a game. What we say and do literally affects the eternal destiny of people around us. Therefore, it’s high time we get rid of our **practical amnesia**. We’ve got to remember who we are! We’re not a

bunch of mentally challenged earth-bound rats. Are you kidding! We are the Church of Jesus Christ. We are a **Body of Strangers on our way to heaven!**

To find the way to God, to understand the *truth* of God's Word, and to received the gift of eternal *life*, begin by repentance and faith through a prayer like this:

“Dear God, I understand that I have broken Your Law and sinned against You. Please forgive my sins. Thank You that Jesus suffered on the cross in my place. I now place my trust in Him as My Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.”
