

Crisis in The Church: Incorrect Solutions

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Matthew 17:14-21

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False assumptions always cause false conclusions. False conclusions always create false solutions. False solutions ultimately produce failure.

The healing of the demon possessed boy in Matthew 17.14-21 clearly illustrates these truths. This incident reveals the condition of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world today.

The sick boy pictures the world: hurting, hopeless, and helpless. The disciples typify the Church: incorrect, ineffective, and impotent.

As the disciples could not cure the demon possessed boy, neither can the Church affect the world today. She exerts an ineffective influence upon the world. In short, the Church has failed to fulfill God's commands.

Evidence of Her failure abounds. Stated simply, four main signs testify to the Church's defeat:

1. defection from the Church;
2. the disavowal of cardinal doctrines;
3. the difference from the New Testament Church;
4. discord with the commands of Jesus Christ.

The current plight of the Church follows certainly from Her unbelief.

The circumstances in Matthew 17 clearly identify the presence and impact of unbelief upon the disciples' failure. Each of the parties present disclosed their unbelief.

1. The Scribes showed willful and persistent unbelief, because they stubbornly sought a sign from Jesus.
2. The father revealed unwilling unbelief, when he cried, "I believe, help my unbelief."
3. The boy demonstrated irresponsible unbelief, because he was demon possessed.
4. The disciples manifested unconscious unbelief. Not only did they not trust God for the healing of the boy. But prior to this situation, they had rejected the Lord's statements to them about His upcoming death (Matthew 16.21-23).⁽¹⁾

Consequently, the disciples reaped the harvest of their unbelief.

1. They assumed an inaccurate diagnosis of the boy's problem.
2. Then they attempted an ineffective solution to the problem.
3. Finally, they failed because of insufficient power to overcome the enemy. ⁽²⁾

Unbelief lies at the root of all sin and spiritual failure, then and now. It blinds the eyes to the truth, to the condition of others, and to our own condition.

Unbelief causes dependence upon human effort by giving place to the world, the flesh, and the devil. Ultimately, it prevents the intervention of God's supernatural authority and ability.

The failing of the disciples replays itself in the Church today. The Church fails to impact the world. Sadly, the reverse is true. Without question, the Church desperately needs spiritual revival.

She faces a crossroads. She can continue in Her present path toward judgment. Or She can correct Her existing condition to seek repentance, reformation, and revival.

From the incident related in Matthew 17.14-21, I want to examine some particular truths about the disciples and their ineffective solutions to the boy's problem. I will show how it applies to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will clarify for you the truth, convict you of its need in your life, and correct you to bring about spiritual repentance and revival in you that will revolutionize and transform your life. I pray that it will lead to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The disciples' effort

Luke 9.1-10 describes a time prior to this occasion when Jesus sent out His disciples with the power to heal and to cast out demons. They had returned from that assignment rejoicing with accounts of their successes.

Now came the distraught father with his afflicted son. The record does not clearly indicate the methods they tried. But it takes little imagination to think what they did. Most likely they tried what had previously worked in other circumstances.

One thing, though, is certain. The methods that they tried did not work. They failed. Their unbelief and failure to seek God's face caused them to attempt an ineffective solution.

Their failure points out an important truth. Rightness of doctrine and the application of Biblical means do not guarantee success nor assure God's presence and power.

Reread that sentence again, for it defines an important truth. Many people in that day and in this day stumble over it.

No group of people followed the law of God more devotedly than the Scribes and the Pharisees. Yet God frequently condemned them for their unbelief. He called them whited sepulchres (Matthew 23.27). He called them hypocrites (Matthew 23.25). They were orthodox, but lifeless.

The Bible warns about this condition. It describes those who have a form of godliness but who deny the power thereof (2 Timothy 3.5). For the letter of the law killeth; it is the spirit that giveth life (2 Corinthians 3.6).

These references describe the disciples in their effort to cure the sick boy. They, too, characterize the Church today. Their failure and the Church's failure results, in large measure, from the application of ineffective solutions.

Jesus' evaluation

Jesus pointed out the validity of this charge against the disciples. Note Jesus' response in Matthew 17:21:

“Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”

Take particular heed to the phrase, “...this kind goeth not out but by...” In this fashion, Jesus stated that there are certain solutions that are useless.⁽³⁾ In other words, the power used by the disciples on previous occasions had no value with “...this kind...”

Their inaccurate diagnosis had indeed produced an ineffective solution. It was unsuitable for the case at hand. It left them helpless and hopeless against the boy's problem. The sick child remained enslaved.

Without question, the dilemma of the disciples repeats itself in the Church of Jesus Christ today. She, too, has concluded an inaccurate diagnosis to the problems She faces. Further, like the disciples, the Church depends upon ineffective solutions to solve them.

The following section identifies many of the current ineffective solutions in the Church. I have grouped them together with other similar concepts for ease of understanding

In this short article, I cannot identify all of them nor explain all of the problems associated with them. I will note only a few of the more well-known ones.

Defense

1) Apologetics⁽⁴⁾

Down through history, this method has captured the fancy of numerous advocates. It is the attempt to make Christianity acceptable and commendable to mankind.

In recent years, this approach has centered in three areas, philosophy, psychology, and science. The Church has tended to defend its truths by attempting to show a Biblical background for each of these fields.

The result, they claim, shows a credible Bible. Thus it becomes more appealing to persons impressed by these comparisons.

2) Archaeology⁽⁵⁾

In a similar vein, some ardent Bible students emphasize the confirmation of Biblical records to make its record appealing and acceptable to mankind.

In a clever way, however, it undermines faith in God. To rely upon archaeology for proof shows that the person really lacks faith in God's word. To trust God's word explicitly and exclusively would rule out the need for archaeological evidence as proof.

In addition, these discoveries frequently give rise to a variety of interpretations which muddy the waters.

Granted, every confirmation from these discoveries encourages believers. But faith does not rely upon external proofs but an inward witness from God by the Holy Spirit.

3) Authority

Still others attempt to defend the truthfulness of the Bible with reference to authority figures.

These authorities come from all areas of life. They do have one thing in common, a well-known image.⁽⁶⁾ For example, these people come from sports, business, politics, humanitarianism, and even religion.

These witnesses have powerful personalities and attract the masses. In effect, the Church uses them as an endorsement of the Bible and Christianity.

But God does not need an endorsement. Further, these three attempts have one common attribute. They try to defend the Scriptures and God, as if He needs defense.

Modernity

In recent years, local churches have relied upon numerous devices in their misguided attempts to fulfill God's mandate for the Church. Space does not permit me to list them all nor to comment fully on them.

Here's a list of the more common devices:

1. popular motivational speakers;
2. best selling authors and books on church growth;
3. articles and symposiums on how to build big churches;
4. church doctors and consultants;
5. facilities: gyms; lounges; design; location; prayer centers; etc.;
6. emulation of "growing churches;"
7. committees;
8. demographics;
9. surveys and polls;
10. church programs.

All of these devices have several common factors which contradict Biblical truth. In the first place, they reject the divinely appointed role given to the Holy Spirit. God has given the Church the Master Consultant and Advisor, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus sent Him to the Church for just this purpose. A brief reading of John 14-16 and the description of His actions in the book of Acts will give ample evidence of His role in the Church.

Second, the Bible clearly identifies Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church. The Church needs to seek Him for direction and Him alone. All of these devices replace His role as Head of the Church.

Third, I have yet to read an article, report, book, or advertisement in support of these devices that provided any Biblical justification or spiritual reason for their recommendations.

In fact, the ones that I have read completely ignore the potential of God's intervention in the affairs of His Church. Instead, they rely exclusively upon polls, demographics, so-called success stories of other situations, and personal advice.

Fourth, their approach tends more to the methods used by business to develop shopping centers. But, the Church is not a shopping center. It is the body of Christ.

As such, then, it functions differently than business. The Bible clearly identifies and explains the standards for Her to follow. The Church is in a desperate condition currently, because She has not followed them.

Fifth, to follow these fallacies ignores or rejects these Biblical truths.

1. It ignores or rejects the exclusive role of the Holy Spirit in drawing sinners to faith in Jesus Christ (John 6.44).
2. It ignores or rejects the Biblical declaration that it is preaching under the anointing of the Holy Spirit that brings sinners to faith and manifests God's word to believers (1 Corinthians 1.21; Titus 1.3).

The Church grows by only one influence, the power of the Holy Spirit. No human artifice can aid. He needs no help. It is a work of God in the heart of mankind.

These stratagies entice the Church to implement programs and devices as an attempt to woo sinners to the Savior or to produce spiritual growth in believers.

These plans replace the Biblically stated means for spiritual life and attainment. It would save countless man-hours, financial cost, and fruitless efforts if the Church would return to and rely upon the three main Biblical means that God designed for these purposes: prayer, preaching, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Political Involvement

Many well-meaning Christians believe that the Church faces a political problem.

They mount massive campaigns to attempt correction of governmental policies and programs. In so doing, they believe that they improve the Church and its impact upon the world.

Like all of the previous methods, this approach ignores the spiritual nature of the Church's problem.

The correct political climate will not solve the sin problem of the world. Only God by His Spirit through the Church can produce such effects.

Economic Considerations

This particular plan has two general emphases currently, boycotts and shortages.

Some believe that if the Church would apply its economic muscle to the marketplace, She would impact the world and effect change. So, they spend hours researching offending businesses to attack.

Still others view the Church's problem in terms of a shortage of money. They say, in effect, that if the Church only had more money, She could more significantly affect the world.

Thus, they assert that increased money would permit greater and grander programs and facilities. Then the Church could impress the world and rescue it.

At the heart of this argument lies a rejection, or at least an ignorance, of the power of God. The work of the Holy Spirit does not rely economic issues.

In fact, the Bible specifically states that the rich will hardly enter the kingdom (Matthew 19.23-24). Further, to specifically cater to the rich at the expense of the poor rejects the very ones that God has chosen as heirs of the kingdom and causes the practice of sin (James 2.1-9).

Conformity

1) Cultural Adaptation

Vast numbers of Church leaders today emphasize that the Church will fail unless She adapts to the culture.

While many in the past have tried to segregate from their surrounding culture (with no effect), today's emphasis lies in just the opposite. In ways too numerous to list here, the Church has fallen for this concept in droves.

Rather than counter culture the Church conforms to it. In its watered down state, the Church wallows helplessly against the world's constantly changing mores. She neither fits in nor stands against it. Therefore, it does not, yea cannot correct and change it.

The culturalization of the Church always draws the Church from Her Biblically stated means, message, and mandate. God will not, does not bless such efforts.

2) Biblical Translations⁽⁷⁾

In this attempt, the solution takes the form of presenting the Biblical message in understandable terms. Rid the Bible of its stilted language and the world will beat a path to the Church's doorstep.

Sadly, again, this ill-fated method has not solved the problems of the Church. Mostly, Christians buy the new translations, not the world. Furthermore, it has not aided comprehension and understanding. (My computer has not given a readability score on any Biblical text greater than the 8th grade.)

In the end, the Holy Spirit given by Jesus Christ for just this purpose, unveils and reveals spiritual truth to the human heart and mind.

3) Mass Media⁽⁸⁾

This emphasis depends upon modern marketing and advertising techniques to sell the gospel and its life changing truths.

The Church spends millions of dollars every year in this dead-end concept. It sounds all well and good. After all, the world does it successfully, why not the Church? However, it ignores important Biblical doctrines.

For example, the Bible clearly states that no one comes to Jesus Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6.44). Further, the Bible clearly states that no one seeks after God, no not one (Romans 3.11-18). Last, it relies upon the false doctrine that salvation can be sold, like a bar of soap. But, the Bible emphatically says that it is a gift from God (Ephesians 2.8-9).

These stated failures do not even begin to include other omissions too numerous to include in this short article.

4) Popular Evangelism ⁽⁹⁾

In our day, the Church has molded a popular form of evangelism in an attempt to garner believers.

This form, however, frequently does not even resemble the Biblical message of the gospel. Habitually, preachers utilizing this method attempt to bring sinners into the kingdom through the back door.

By that I mean that they present the gospel as a means for solving marriage difficulties, bringing personal happiness, or other similar popular themes.

Instead, the Bible presents it in far different terms. It demands repentance, life change, and sacrifice, seldom mentioned in popular evangelism.

All of these popular methods and techniques of solving the Church's problems have these consequences in common:

1. They attempt to make Christianity acceptable and commendable to sinners.
2. They appeal to the flesh.
3. They replace Biblical means.
4. They substitute human means for the Holy Spirit.

Granted the adherents of these methods can point to some meager favorable results. But in the face of these apparent successes, I will remind you of several important truths.

1. Past successes do not guarantee future results.
2. The ends do not justify the means.
3. The power of God does not rest in methods, even God given methods.
4. The power of the Holy Spirit does not rest in means, but in God who uses means.

The Church has become pragmatic instead of obedient to God's word. Regardless of the apparent success, such an approach reveals unbelief and causes disobedience.

Paul clearly admonished the Roman Church who practiced this very concept. He warned not to continue in sin that grace may abound (Roman 6.1-2)

These truths outline for us ineffective solutions for the Church's problems. I pray that the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to understand them and believe them.

Where has the Holy Spirit identified your failure to apply them in your life? Do they mold and shape your life?

Or do you ignore the role of the Holy Spirit in these matters? Do you doubt God's supernatural power?

Has He found you faithful or doubtful? Innocent or guilty? To err in them brings the consequences of sin against you and the Church.

Further, it dethrones the sovereignty of the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. It grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit.

God by His Spirit can use these truths to correct you from sin. They show false doctrine to avoid and sinful practices to shun.

He can conform your thoughts, opinions, and beliefs to God's word. He can empower you to obey the specific duties which these truths require.

I pray that He will graciously apply them to you to spiritually transform and revive your life.

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