

Study Guide

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Bible text:

Date Preached:

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Website: <http://www.masterministries.org/>

Online Sermons: <http://masterministries.sermonaudio.com>

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All scripture references are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: ISBN: 0-941251-05-5

Ineffective Influence In The World

Summary of Topic

The Bible provides many examples that reveal the need for revival. One in particular comes from Matthew 17:14-21. A distraught father had brought his demon possessed son to the disciples for help. They failed in their attempt to cast out the demon. As Jesus came down the mountain, He saw the crowd, questioned the father, and then healed the boy.

This striking account pictures the current condition of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹ The demon possessed child represents the world. The disciples depict the Church. As the disciples had no affect upon the boy, so the Church has no affect upon the world today. This ineffective influence gives an unpleasantly conspicuous signal of the desperate need of revival in the Church.

The child's condition

The other references to this incident from Mark and Luke describe his state even more graphically. Those writers describe the uncontrollable fits and convulsions into which the demon threw him.

Truly, the child was helpless and hopeless. As Dr. G. Campbell Morgan points out, that although he lived in a cultured society, he found no solution to their problem from it.² Indeed, the world today mimics this suffering boy. It, too, suffers at the vile hand of Satan and his evil demons. It, too, finds no answers from the cultured society at hand.

Again, like the afflicted boy, mankind can find help only at the feet of Jesus Christ.

The disciples' failure

As the father responds to Jesus, he describes the failure of the disciples. In other words, they tried to cast out the demon that controlled the boy. But, they could not effect a cure. The child continued to suffer.

Yes, the disciples display a clear picture of the Church of Jesus Christ today. In like manner, as they failed, the Church has failed. It does not impact the world. Worse yet, the present day records the continual decline of what little influence it had from the past. In addition, many believers today live with an inner failure that eats away at their spiritual vigor.

Like the disciples, the Church has made its attempts to change the world and the inner dissatisfaction of believers, but without success. The conditions remain not just unchanged, but worse.

The Church's condition

Sadly, the Church of Jesus Christ has become an ineffective influence in the world today. The world no longer dreads the Church as it has in times past. With regularity, it derides the Body of Christ. It disrespects the presence and power of the Church and disregards the Church's position on matters of life.

Outside the Church, this lack of interest reveals the Church's importance and ineffectiveness. Inside the Church, the inner discontent within believers causes spiritual misgivings. Extensive evidence within the Church confirms these conclusions.

One evidence comes from the defection from the Church. This defection expresses itself in at least four ways:

1. decrease in Church attendance,
2. desertion from the Lord's Day observance,
3. decline in ministerial candidates,
4. disinterest in personal holiness.

In regards to these serious signs, the noted Christian scholar Dr. J. Gresham Machen stated:

“...these things are simply surface indications of a decline in the power of Christianity. Christianity is exerting a far less powerful direct influence in the civilized world today...”³

In addition, signs appear in the Church's disavowal of cardinal Biblical doctrines. The following list discloses those key areas.

1. God: The Church today often questions, for example, the sovereignty of God and His sovereign intervention in the lives of mankind.
2. The wrath of God: Little is said about the judgment of God against sin, either in the lives of unbelievers or believers. It now seems that Christians and non-Christians can sin with license.
3. Jesus Christ: While the world questions the deity of Christ, the Church questions the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. He only made the forgiveness of sins possible, they say.
4. The Holy Spirit: At last count, I have noted 27 verbs that describe the action of the Holy Spirit in believers' lives. How many do you know? How many of them are active in your life?
5. Regeneration: Most believers do not even know the term nor what it means. Yet it describes the initial work of the Holy Spirit in the life of an unbeliever.
6. Justification by faith alone: This is another term that has fallen by the wayside and gets clouded with works.
7. The doctrines of salvation: Sadly, few believers can name them. They include but are not limited to such crucial truths as unconditional election, the total depravity of mankind, and mankind's inherent helplessness to change his condition before God.
8. The authority of the Scriptures: As stated earlier, this doctrine is loudly proclaimed but silently disregarded in practice. The Church today habitually ignores faith in its doctrines and obedience to its commands.
9. Sanctification: Sadly, few believers understand it, and fewer still pursue it.
10. Repentance: It seems that this truth no longer has a place in Church doctrine or practice. Salvation and spiritual growth are presented without any mention of it, as if it didn't matter. It does.
11. Faith: Too often the Church does not encourage the practice and growth of faith beyond salvation. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus asked if He would find faith when He returned (Luke 18.8).
12. Obedience: Somehow, this factor of Christianity has become an option. It seems that we can "ask Jesus into our hearts..." and then ignore Him the rest of our lives as if it didn't make any difference.
13. The doctrine of the Church: The new doctrine of the Church ignores the Biblical mandates and operation of the Church. Like the world, the Church has become entirely pragmatic. If it works, it must be right. The ends justify the means. These myths have captured the imagination of leaders and laity alike and led the Church into its present slothful condition.

The difference between the historical Church and the Church of today reveals a third evidence. For example, the experience of the modern Church vastly varies from Biblical times.

A serious examination of the book of Acts exposes numerous contrasts between the New Testament Church and the modern Church. Further, this historical disparity continues to

show itself in the modern Church's deviation from the post-Biblical Church, especially during revival times.

The following quotation from Jonathan Edwards will clarify this conclusion. He wrote it as a general description of the revival that God sent to his Church in Northampton MA.

“This work soon made a glorious alteration in the town. So that in the Spring and Summer following it seemed, that is to say the town, seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love nor so full of joy and yet so full of distress as it was then. There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house.

It was a time of joy in families on account of salvation being brought to them. Parents rejoicing over their children as newborn, husbands over their wives and wives over their husbands. The doings of God were then seen in His sanctuary. God's day was a delight and His tabernacles were amiable. Our public assemblies were then beautiful. The congregation was alive in God's service.

Everyone (was) earnestly intent on the public worship. Every hearer (was) eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth. The assembly in general (was) from time to time in tears while the Word was preached. Some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.”⁴

Of course, this brief excerpt does not completely describe the conditions of the Church in revival. But it does describe what has occurred in every recorded revival in Biblical or post-Biblical history. It is a repeat of Pentecost and the book of Acts.

To my great sorrow, I know of no Church that fits this description. Surely, a few exceptions exist here and there, particularly in South America and perhaps China. Even if these exceptions prove true, which I pray they do, it still speaks volumes about the desperate need for spiritual revival in the Church of Jesus Christ today.

Clearly, the modern Church is at discord with the Scriptural commands of Christ found in the Sermon on the Mount. In that notable message, Jesus called the Church to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5.13-14). I believe that the modern-day Church fulfills neither command.

Yes, sadly, the Church of Jesus Christ has become an ineffective influence in the world today. It desperately needs a spiritual revival. We need to repent of our sin and cry out to God for mercy. We need to pray earnestly the prayer of Habakkuk 3:2:

“O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

References

1. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Revival (Crossway Books, Westchester, IL) 1987, p. 9.
 2. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan. The Gospel According To Matthew (Revell, NJ) 1929, p. 224.
 3. Dr. J. Gresham Machen. "Christianity And Culture." Mars Hill Monographs (Mars Hill, Charlottesville, VA) p. 8.
 4. Jonathan Edwards. The Works Of Jonathan Edwards. London. 1840. Vol. I, p. 348.
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Topics for Discussion

1. In what ways is the world suffering today?
2. Does the Church try to influence the world? How does she attempt to do so? Define her success.
3. List evidence of defection from the Church.
4. Define and show understanding of:

- A. regeneration
- B. justification
- C. sanctification
- D. salvation

5. Cite Scripture references for each.

2. regeneration: John 3.1-8
3. justification: Romans 5.1
4. sanctification: Romans 15.16; 1 Corinthians 1.30; 2 Thessalonians 2.13; 1 Peter 1.2
5. salvation: Mark 1.15; John 3.16;

6. How can understanding these concepts stir up life in the Church?
7. Jesus called the Church to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Relate ways in which the revived Church could be "salt" and "light."

Topics for Application

So what? you may ask. What difference does it make? What practical implications/demands do these truths require of you? How then should I act/respond/behave because of these truths? What effect should these truths have upon my life as a consequence? What can the Holy Spirit accomplish in your life today because of these truths?

3. He can reveal to you truth to believe and to obey.

- A. the need for spiritual revival in the Church of Jesus Christ

- B. the need for spiritual revival in your life
 - C. example(s) to avoid
2. He can refute false conclusions about the condition of the Church/you.
 - A. the false comfort of religious experience
 - B. the false comfort of self righteousness
 3. He can reassure you with these truths.
 - A. reaffirmation of the truth
 - a. condition of the Church
 - b. condition of your life
 - c. truths of God's word about the need for spiritual revival
 - B. benefits of the truth
 - a. hope for uncertainty
 - b. relief for the repentant
 - c. encouragement for faithfulness to God
 4. He can require their application in your life.
 - A. belief
 - a. recognition of the truth
 - b. turning from false confidence
 - c. believing the truth
 - B. obedience
 - a. shunning sinful practices and beliefs
 - b. submission to the truth
 - c. conformity of life to the truth
 - 01. thought
 - 02. word
 - 03. action
- a. repentance from unbelief and disobedience
 - b. adoration to God
 - c. service to God
5. He can rebuke you of sin.

A. Where has the Holy Spirit identified today your failure to apply these truths in your life?

- a. Does your life imitate the disciples? the boy? the father?
- b. Does this account describe you/your Church?

04. ineffectiveness

05. helplessness

C. What conclusions about your conduct/condition has the Holy Spirit revealed to you today?

- a. lack of knowledge of the truth?
- b. approval/reproof?
- c. innocence/guilt?

D. If you have failed to apply these truths in your life, then you suffer severe consequences of your sin.

a. against yourself

01. absence of God's glorious presence

02. lack of spiritual power

03. lack of personal holiness

b. against God

01. failure to glorify God

02. degradation of God's character

c. against the Holy Spirit

01. grieving the Holy Spirit.

02. quenching the Holy Spirit.

6. He can reform you from sin.

A. acknowledgement of your sin

- a. unbelief
- b. disobedience
- c. example to avoid

B. confession of your impotency/inability: 2 Corinthians 3.5: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God."

- C. recognition of God's power: Matthew 19.26: "...with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."
 - D. dealing with God earnestly about His help for you
7. He can regulate you to the truth.
- A. conformity of thoughts, opinions, and beliefs to God's word
 - B. conformity of actions to God's word
 - C. conformity to the image of Jesus Christ
8. He can revive you.
- A. outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon your life
 - B. reformation of life
9. He can rouse you to saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- A. lack of meaning of these truths in your life
 - B. no application of these truths in your life
 - C. no personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
 - D. sense of sin
 - E. guilt of sin
 - F. need of a Savior
 - a. deserving of God's eternal judgment
 - b. danger of God's eternal judgment
 - c. helplessness before a holy God
 - d. inability to help/save yourself
 - G. provision of salvation in Jesus Christ for all who trust Him
 - a. a revelation of God's provision in Jesus Christ
 - b. the expression of God's grace and mercy
 - c. the only hope of relief from judgment of sin
 - d. driven to Jesus Christ for relief/deliverance
 - e. payment of the penalty for sinners like you
 - f. Mark 1:15: "And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."
 - g. John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
 - h. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: {9} Not of works, lest any man should boast."
10. In light of these truths, how will you respond to their role in your life?

A. rejection

a. clues

- 01. defense of condition
- 02. excuses
- 03. delay

b. cautions

- 01. God's requirements

A. duty of personal holiness, faith, and obedience to His word

B. duty of immediate repentance from sin without delay

- 02. accountability before God for your actions
- 03. consequences of your unbelief and disobedience

A. God's judgment for sin

B. absence of God's glorious presence

C. reaffirmation

- a. encouragement
- b. faith
- c. obedience
- d. praise

D. repentance from sin

- a. without compromise
- b. without concealment
- c. in detail
- d. forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ
- e. cleansing from sin unto spiritual revival

01. 1 John 1:9

02. 1 John 2:1

E. rely upon the Holy Spirit

- a. understanding the truth of God's word
- b. granting repentance from sin
- c. faith to believe
- d. power to obey

I pray that you will experience the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life today. I pray that He will open your eyes to see your true condition before God. I pray that He will bring you to repent of your sin. I pray that He will bring you to saving faith in Jesus Christ. I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these Biblical truths in your life and find relief through the blood of Jesus Christ.

May the Holy Spirit come to you in grace and bring a spiritual revival in your life today.

Unbelief

Summary of Topic

Matthew 17 records the miraculous healing of a demon possessed boy. It occurred after the disciples had failed to cast out the demon. Upon His descent from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus healed the boy. This account gives a clear picture of the Church of Jesus Christ today. The demon possessed boy illustrates the world. The disciples depict the Church. Their inability to help the sick child portrays the helplessness of the Church to influence the world today. As they failed, so has the Church.

What caused the disciples to fail? They, too, wondered at what was behind it. Thus, they came to Jesus and asked Him. Matthew recorded the response from Jesus in Matthew 17:19-20:

“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? {20} And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

From this passage, I want to examine some particular absolute truths about the disciples' unbelief and how it applies to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

The disciples' assumptions

In chapter 10 of his book, Matthew wrote of the disciples' assignment to go and cast out demons. At that time, Jesus gave them power to cast out demons and to heal all kinds of disease. Matthew did not set down the account of their mission. But Mark did. He wrote a short comment about the success of their mission in Mark 6:12-13:

“And they went out, and preached that men should repent. {13} And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”

The disciples experienced a successful mission. They had authority over devils and demons. They healed the sick. In their attempt to cure the boy, the disciples made three false assumptions:

1. they assumed that they knew how to solve the boy's ills;
2. they assumed that what had always worked previously would work this time;
3. they assumed that they could count on the power that had accompanied them in the past.

Obviously, they were wrong.

Jesus' answer

Jesus gave them a short answer to their question. They could not cast out the demon from the boy because of their unbelief. Jesus clearly identified the disciples' problem: unbelief. They failed to fully trust God to do what only He could do. They fell short of full and complete reliance upon God alone and nothing else. In like manner, the Church fails today because of unbelief. It seeks for aid from the manners and customs of the world. The Church lacks full and complete faith in God alone.

Regardless of its cause, unbelief fails to account for several crucial factors:

1. the necessity of God's power to effect spiritual life;
2. the extent of God's power;
3. the requirement of personal preparation for spiritual warfare;
4. the helplessness of human abilities and their enmity against God.

The importance of faith

Faith reveals three essential assurances. It believes that God has spoken in His word. It considers what He has spoken as true. Finally, it knows that God will act according to what He has said. Faith forms the basis of everything in the Christian life. It furnishes the foundation of all that the Church accomplishes. It links mankind with the power of God.

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus explained how much a small amount of faith can accomplish. It can move mountains and cast them into the sea. In fact, the Scriptures declare that God requires faith as the basis of pleasing Him. All else is sin. The following two references clearly make these statements.

Romans 14:23: "...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

Hebrews 11:6: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

Because the disciples did not believe God, they failed. In like manner the Church fails today in its attempts to cure the ills of mankind because of unbelief.

The consequences of unbelief

Unbelief always causes spiritual failure. It lies at the root of all sin. Unbelief reveals three sad effects.

Unbelief blinds the eyes. It hides the truth. It obscures the true condition of others. Further, it conceals the true condition of self.

Unbelief causes dependence upon human effort. It gives place to the world, the flesh, and the devil. It directs reliance upon personalities, programs, and procedures, instead of upon God.

Unbelief prevents God's supernatural power. Instead, it boasts in human ability, ingenuity, and enterprise. Despite claims to the contrary, unbelief leaves God out of plans and purposes.

The failure of the disciples exhibits all of these effects. As a result, their unbelief caused three problems:

1. an inaccurate diagnosis of the boy's problem. Jesus distinguished between devils with His statement, "...this kind..." The disciples missed it entirely.
2. ineffectual solutions to the boy's problem. Again, Jesus showed the necessity of a particular solution when He said, "...but by..." The disciples had relied upon business as usual.
3. insufficient power to cast out the demon. Jesus revealed the need for special power to remove the demon when He called for "...prayer and fasting..." The disciples made no such search for God's power.

Thus, they met abject failure. Similarly, the Church of Jesus Christ and perhaps even you meet failure today because of these same consequences. The Church has inaccurately diagnosed the problem of mankind. It has proposed and implemented ineffectual solutions that have proven false. As a result, it lacks God's glorious presence and power, which alone can cure the ills of mankind.

All of this results from the same root cause: unbelief.

Topics for Discussion

1. The disciples made assumptions about the boy with the demon.
 - A. They assumed that they knew the solution
 - B. They assumed that what had worked in the past would always work.
 - C. They assumed that the power they had exercised in the past would continue to accompany them.
2. Describe parallels between the Church and the disciples in these three assumptions. Use specific illustrations.
3. What is the source or cause of the Church's failure to believe?
4. How does unbelief "play out" in typical churches each week?
5. According to this lesson, what is the correct diagnosis of the problem of mankind?
6. How does a spirit of unbelief handicap us in correct diagnosis?
7. How can we discern the difference between our own earnest self-effort and God's glorious presence and plan?

Topics for Application

So what?, you may ask. What difference does it make? What practical implications/demands do these truths require of you? How then should I act/respond/behave because of these truths? What effect should these truths have upon my life as a consequence? What can the Holy Spirit accomplish in your life today because of these truths?

1. He can clarify for you the truth to believe and obey.
 - A. truth to believe
 - b) spiritual failure of the Church/Christians
 - c) requirement for the power of God
 - B. truth to obey
 - a. example to avoid
 - b. teaching to follow
2. He can contradict false doctrine.
 - A. the insignificance of faith
 - B. false assumptions about prior experiences with God
3. He can comfort you with these truths.
 - A. agreement with the truth
 - B. reaffirmation of the truth

- C. comfort for your conscience
 - D. hope for uncertainty
4. He can command their application in your life.
- A. faith for doubt
 - B. shunning sinful practices based upon unbelief
 - C. submission to the truth
 - D. conformity of your life to the truth
- d) thought
 - e) word
 - f) deed
5. He can convict you of sin.
- A. Where has the Holy Spirit identified today your failure to apply these truths in your life?
 - g) your attitude vs. the disciples' attitude
 - h) practice of self-effort
 - i) practice of self-righteousness
 - j) conformity to manners and methods of society
 - k) conformity of life to these truths
 - l) condition of unbelief
 - B. What conclusions about your conduct and condition has the Holy Spirit revealed to you today?
 - a. faith/doubt?
 - b. approval/disapproval?
 - c. innocent/guilty?
 - C. If He has found you guilty, you suffer the consequences of your unbelief and disobedience.
 - a. lack of God's glorious presence and spiritual power
 - b. robbery from God of the glory He deserves
 - c. degradation of His character
 - d. rejection of His sovereignty
 - e. grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit by rejecting His work in your life
6. He can correct you from sin.
- A. acknowledgement of your sin

- B. confession of your impotency/inability: 2 Corinthians 3.5: “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.”
 - C. recognition of God's power: Matthew 19.26: “...with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
 - D. dealing with God earnestly about His help for you
7. He can complete you unto good works.
- A. spiritual reformation of life
 - B. spiritual revival
8. He can cause you to have saving faith in Jesus Christ.
- A. lack of meaning of these truths in your life
 - B. no application of these truths in your life
 - C. no personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
 - D. sense of sin
 - E. guilt of sin
 - F. need of a Savior
 - a. deserving of God's eternal judgment
 - b. danger of God's eternal judgment
 - c. helplessness before a holy God
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 - h. Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: {9} Not of works, lest any man should boast."
9. In light of these truths, how will you respond to their role in your life?
- A. rejection

a. clues

01. blaming others
02. justification of actions

b. cautions

01. God's requirements

- a) duty of personal holiness, faith, and obedience to His word
- b) duty of immediate repentance from sin without delay

01. accountability before God for your actions

02. consequences of your unbelief and disobedience

- b) God's judgment for sin
- c) absence of God's glorious presence

B. reaffirmation

- a) encouragement
- b) faith
- c) obedience
- d) praise

C. repentance from sin

- a. without compromise
- b. without concealment
- c. in detail
- d. forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ
- e. cleansing from sin unto spiritual revival

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D. rely upon the Holy Spirit

- f. understanding the truth of God's word
- g. granting repentance from sin
- h. faith to believe
- i. power to obey

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Christ. I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these Biblical truths in your life and find relief through the blood of Jesus Christ.

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Incorrect Diagnosis

Summary of Topic

The miracle recorded in Matthew 17.14-21 pictures the condition of the Church of Jesus Christ in the world today. The demon possessed boy depicts the world; the disciples show the Church. In the passage, the disciples could not cure the sick boy. They attempted to cast out the demon, but failed. They were powerless to bring about a cure in him. In similar fashion, the Church today, including perhaps even you, is powerless and helpless to affect the sinful condition of the world. The Church exerts an ineffective influence upon the world.

Your failure and that of the Church shows itself in at least four symptoms:

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

Jesus pointed out in Matthew 17.20 the cause of the disciples' failure: unbelief. They had failed to trust God. The disciples' unbelief blinded their eyes to the truth, to their condition, and to the difficulty of the demon possessed boy. It caused them to depend upon human effort, which in the end prevented the intervention and display of God's supernatural power through them. As a result, the disciples failed to bring about a cure of the boy.

Their unbelief caused three errors that led to their failure:

1. an inaccurate diagnosis of the problem;
2. an incorrect solution to the problem; and
3. insufficient power to solve the problem.¹

Believers make the same errors as the disciples did. And the Church fails today as they did. These conclusions reveal the desperate need of the Church, perhaps even you, today: spiritual revival. From this account Matthew 17, I want to examine with you one of the consequences of the disciples' unbelief: their inaccurate diagnosis of the boy's problem. This truth applies to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

Inaccurate diagnosis

In their evaluation of the boy, the disciples failed to diagnosis properly his condition.² They realized the true nature of his problem. It was not physical in nature, like blindness or a defect. Nor was it an illness. They did recognize the signs of demonic activity. But they analyzed only part of his state. When they discerned his condition, they immediately attempted methods that they thought would work. Sadly, they failed.

Although they discerned demonic forces, they totally missed the severity of the problem. They fell short in their understanding the power of the evil one. They missed the persistence of the enemy.

Ultimately, they failed because they reached an inaccurate diagnosis of the situation.

Jesus' diagnosis

But, the Lord Jesus properly diagnosed the young boy's condition. He cast out the demon and healed the boy. When asked by His disciples to explain their failure, He told them in Matthew 17:21:

“...this kind...”

Jesus identified a difference in demon possession. Not all of them were alike. There were varieties of kinds. The boy had a different kind of condition than the disciples had previously encountered.³ Because Jesus properly distinguished between spirits, He could bring healing to the boy. Jesus discerned that the true nature of the boy's problem lay in the spiritual realm, not the physical realm. He comprehended the full extent of the power, persistence, and presence of the evil one at the root of the child's difficulty.

Failure of the Church

At this present time, however, the Church of Jesus Christ fails to recognize the true nature of the problem that confronts it. It misses the point. In general, the Church defines the nature of the problem as political, economical, or cultural. Worst of all, however, are those who do not see any problem at all. Few of the Church's ranks correctly see the true nature of the problem, a spiritual problem. The Bible correctly identifies the true enemy of the Church in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: {4} (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) {5} Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; {6} And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.”

Like the disciples of old, you face a world controlled by the devil. The Bible describes some of his manifestations with these profiles:

1. the serpent (Revelation 12.9);
2. the dragon (Revelation 12.9);
3. the roaring lion who roams about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5.8);
4. an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11.14);
5. the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2.2);
6. beelzebub (Matthew 12.24);
7. the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12.10);
8. abaddon/apollyon (Revelation 9.11);
9. the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2.2); and
10. lucifer (Isaiah 14.12).

Because of the diabolical deceit of the enemy, he hides his true identity behind many disguises. But, the problems that believers and the Church face are spiritual in their character. That explains why the Holy Spirit through Paul clarified the truth in this passage. In addition, satan works through a well organized and well disguised kingdom. The Holy Spirit reveals the extent of this realm in Ephesians 6:10-12:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. { 11 } Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. { 12 } For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, (and) powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in (heavenly) places.”

In this reference, God's word confirms the true nature of the enemy, not flesh and blood. Further, it identifies four divisions of authority in satan's kingdom:

1. principalities, or first level magistrates;
2. powers, or demons with superhuman delegated powers;
3. rulers of the darkness of this world, or devils who use strength to seize or retain authority over the darkness of error; and
4. spiritual wickedness in high places, or wicked spirits in the heavenlies.

From both of these Biblical references, I want to identify several common elements important to the diagnosis of the Church's ineffectiveness in the world.

1. The enemy is not human in its source. Although it often disguises itself as human (e. g. political, economical, or cultural symptoms), and it may attack believers in these human ways, it is not a human enemy that you face. It is a spiritual enemy.
2. Your enemy is strong and well organized. Despite this truth, however, he is not omnipotent, omniscient, nor omnipresent. But God is. God has eternal authority over him and all of his evil kingdom.
3. Victory over the evil one rests upon spiritual weapons, not carnal or human ones. Thus, any attempt to influence the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ by reliance upon human weapons will fail. Only spiritual weapons that are mighty through God can and will bring victory for you and the Church.

Importance of diagnosis

As you can now see, the wrong diagnosis of the problem of the Church leads to disaster. This disaster reveals itself in at least four ways.

1. It creates incorrect solutions. This failure causes reliance upon human methods, manpower, and mechanics that cannot touch the spiritual foe nor overcome him.
2. The wrong diagnosis of the Church's problem causes an ineffective Church. It is unproductive from within, lacking spiritual vitality and life. It is impotent without, ineffectual in its mandate to the world.
3. The wrong diagnosis of the Church's problem consents to the continued control of the devil. The wrong diagnosis leaves the enemy unaffected. He continues his diabolical works unhindered by the Church.
4. The wrong diagnosis of the Church's problem curbs the work of the Holy Spirit. It leaves the invalid as he came, demon possessed, and unchanged.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has shown you your true condition before God and the necessity of His supernatural work to apply these Biblical truths to your life. I pray that you will experience the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life today. I pray that He will bring you to repent of your sin. I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these Biblical truths in your life and find relief through the blood of Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit come to you in grace and bring a spiritual transformation in your life today.

References

1. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Revival (Crossway Books, Westchester, IL) 1987, p. 10.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
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Topics for Discussion

1. How have many churches diagnosed the problem in the Church?
 2. Give illustrations of these profiles of Satan. Describe Satan's typical activities in each of these roles.
 - A. serpent
 - B. lion
 - C. angel of light
 - D. prince of the power of the air
 - E. accuser of the brethren
-
1. Common points to remember in correct diagnosis are:

- A. The nature of the enemy is not human.
 - B. The enemy is strong and well organized.
2. Illustrate these points with your observations of the world around you.
 3. Victory rests in spiritual weapons. Discuss spiritual weapons at the disposal of believers. See Ephesians 6.10-18.
 4. How does wrong diagnosis affect the enemy?
 5. How would correct diagnosis of the problems in the Church and in the world impact weekly activities in the Church?

Topics for Application

How can the Holy Spirit apply the(se) truths in your life today?

1. He can reveal you divine revelation about the presence and nature of unbelief to believe and to obey.
 - A. the true nature of the problem facing Christians
 - B. the true nature of the problem facing the Church of Jesus Christ
2. He can reassure you with these truths.
 - A. reaffirmation of the truth
 - B. renewal of faith
 1. grounding in faith
 2. edification in faith
 3. increase of faith
 4. reason(s) for faith
 - C. hope for uncertainty
 - D. relief for the obedient and repentant
 - E. freedom from doubt, fear, ignorance, the devil and his power
3. He can rebuke you of sin.
 - A. Where has He identified today your failure to apply these truths in your life?
 1. nature of the problem facing the Church/Christians?
 2. reliance upon the flesh?
 - B. What conclusions about your spiritual condition has the Spirit revealed to you?
 3. approval or reproof?
 4. innocent or guilty?

4. He can reform you from sin.
 - A. false doctrine to avoid
 - B. common fallacies of the nature of the problem
 1. politics
 2. economics
 3. culture
 - C. example to avoid
5. He can revive you unto good works.
 - A. fruit of repentance
 - B. conformity to truth
 1. thought
 2. word
 3. action
6. How will you respond to these truths that the Holy Spirit has revealed to you?
 - A. rejection of the(se) truth(s)
 1. excuses
 2. delay
 - B. reaffirmation of the(se) truth(s)
 - C. repentance from your sin
 - D. response to the(se) truth(s) in your life
 - E. reliance upon the Holy Spirit to apply them in your life

I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply them to your life today.

Ineffective Solutions

Summary of Topic

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; and
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.

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.

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.

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. 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; and
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 strategies 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.

influence

1) 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.

2) 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. 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 ⁷

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:

- A. They attempt to make Christianity acceptable and commendable to sinners.
- B. They appeal to the flesh.
- C. They replace Biblical means.
- D. 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.

References

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2. Lloyd-Jones. Revival (Crossway Books, Westchester, IL) 1987, p. 15.
3. Ibid., p. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 15.
5. Ibid., p. 16.
6. Ibid., p. 17.
7. Ibid., p. 17.
8. Ibid., p. 17.
9. Ibid., p. 18.

Topics for Discussion

2. Why did the efforts of the disciples fail to heal the boy in this Scripture passage?
3. Explain what it means to "have a form of Godliness but deny the power thereof?" (2 Timothy 3.5)
4. Define these weaknesses in method often used ineffectively by the Church.

- E. apologetics
- F. archaeology
- G. authority

5. Why do these methods fail?
6. List examples of modern Church methods that fail because of wrong diagnosis.
7. Why does political involvement of the Church fail?
8. Describe the ways in which the Church attempts to adapt to current culture.
9. How has this practice weakened the Church?
10. Discuss these truths

- A. Past successes do not guarantee future results.

- B. The ends do not justify the means.
- C. The power of God does not rest in method, even God-given method.
- D. The power of the Holy Spirit does not rest in means, but in God who uses means.

Topics for Application

How can the Holy Spirit apply the(se) truths in your life today?

1. He can clarify to you the divine revelation about ineffective solutions to the Church's condition to believe and to obey.

- A. the condition of the Church
- B. the ineffective methodology of the Church
- C. the reliance upon methodology instead of the Holy Spirit
- D. the necessity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church
- E. the absence of doctrine
- F. the necessity of faith and obedience to Biblical doctrine

2. He can contradict false doctrine.

- A. the fallacies of present Church methodology
- B. the errors of the primacy of current Church methodology

3. He can comfort you with these truths.

- A. reaffirmation of the truth
- B. renewal of faith in Biblical truth
- C. hope for reliance upon the Holy Spirit

4. He can command their application in your life.

- A. recognition of the truth
- B. turning from error to the truth
- C. faith in the truth
- D. practices to shun
- E. submission to the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus Christ
- F. conformity to the will of God in the building of Christ's church

5. He can convict you of sin.

- A. failure to apply these truths in your life
 - a. reliance upon fallacies
 - b. failure to believe the truth as revealed in the Bible
 - c. disobedience to God's way of building the Church

B. conclusions about your conduct

- a. faith/doubt
- b. obedience/disobedience
- c. approval/reproof
- d. innocent/guilty
- e. ignorance of the truth

C. changes required by the Holy Spirit because of these truths

6. He can correct you from sin.

- A. acknowledgement of your sin
- B. confession of your impotency/inability
- C. repentance from sin
- D. recognition of God's power
- E. dealing with God earnestly about His help for you
- F. trust
- G. obedience

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

Insufficient Power

Summary of Topic

This passage in Matthew 17:14-21 outlines the immediate steps that the Church must take to reverse Her current condition. From this passage, I want to examine some particular absolute truths about the disciples' insufficient power to cast out the demon from the boy. From them, I will show how they apply to the Church of Jesus Christ and your life today.

The boy's cure

Although the disciples attempted to cure the boy, they could not. They failed. The boy remained in his sick condition. This circumstance differed from their earlier successes. Here their attempts revealed insufficient power to overcome the demon in the boy.

In sharp contrast, the Scriptures show the power of Christ. It says in Matthew 17:18:

“And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.”

This simple setting reveals great truths about Jesus Christ.

1. It proves His deity; He performs the works of God.
2. It confirms His omnipotence; His power surpasses the greatest that the evil one can muster.
3. It discloses His nature: loving, gracious, and merciful.
4. It demonstrates His authority: total, sovereign, and complete.
5. It shows the responsibility of mankind to glorify God. They wondered and marveled at the mighty power of God in Christ. See Luke's description of these events in Luke 9.43.

Jesus simply spoke the word and the demon departed. The limitless power of Christ overpowered the limited power of the evil one. With only a rebuke, Jesus restored the boy and relieved his affliction.

The Church's condition

This incident exposes mankind's condition before God, too. On the one hand, it shows the glaring unbelief of all the participants in this event. It also demonstrates their complete helplessness in and of themselves. None of them could help the infirmed boy, including the disciples. Like those early disciples, unbelief characterizes the Church today. Thus, we, too, stand helplessly in the face of our circumstances.

The Church, including you and me, lacks sufficient power to overcome the interference, influence, intimidation, and interruptions of the evil one in the world. Abundant evidence confirms it. The rise of mechanisms for conservation and defense, used by believers and the Church to preserve spiritual gains, reveals a disturbing lack of the power of Christ.¹ These schemes embrace a variety of forms and expressions.

The following list records some, but certainly not all of them:

1. a confidence in methods and means, even Biblical ones;
2. a reliance upon organization and structure; a smooth running, well organized church does not guarantee God's revealed presence; it may, in fact, prove the opposite;
3. a dependency upon programs, productions, and personalities;
4. a trust in the ways of the world and the flesh: goals; slogans; organization; reputation; influence; money; promotion; popularity; and distortion; for example, this category and the previous one rely upon the vain imaginings of men rather than in the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit;
5. an emphasis upon false solutions: knowledge; science; understanding; apologetics; philosophy; and psychology; in recent years, the Church has tended to adopt these solutions, attempting to defend God, Who needs no defense; the best defense is an overpowering offense.

At best, the Church fits the description in Paul's warning to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:5:

“...Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...”

Before the Church and individual Christians can ever experience the overwhelming power of Christ in revival, they must first become aware and convinced of their true condition and need.² The flesh strongly resists the evidences of spiritual failure. For example, pride blossoms and points to apparent “successes.” Further, self-righteousness boasts: “We’re OK; I’m OK. We only need a little improvement in a few areas.”

It is to this condition that the Scriptures speak a rebuke in Psalms 34:18:

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

God gives His grace, not to the self-glorifying, but to the humble. (James 4.6) We, the Church, you, and I, must recognize and admit our weakness and helplessness. We are spiritually impotent. At best, any valid successes of the Church amount to nothing more “...than the slight twitches of the muscles of a drowsy giant, too sleepy to care.”³

Granted the Bible counsels believers not to despise small things. (Zechariah 4.10) But at the same, the Church must realize that today is the day of small things.

The Church’s confidence

However, like the disciples in their dilemma, we, too, have the power of Jesus Christ available to us.⁴ According to promise, Jesus Christ indwells every believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures record this priceless promise in John 14.9-23. In that section, the Lord Jesus gave these promises.

1. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to those who love Him.
2. He promised that the same God Who indwelled Him and performed mighty works and wonders in Him would indwell them, too.
3. He promised that He and the Father would abide within believers because of the Holy Spirit.

Then, every child of God has access to the same supernatural authority and ability of Christ that the disciples did! Think of that for a moment. Words fail me to try to explain the full extent of that truth. The living Christ, Who sits at the right hand of the Father, resides within the life of every believer. That same Jesus, Whom the Bible predicts, describes, declares, reveals, and proves, lives within the child of God.

But sadly, presence and manifest presence are not the same. The mere fact that He is present does not automatically guarantee that He makes His presence known in experience. In fact, the Church today carries out Her affairs with little regard to the manifest presence of the Lord of the Church. The manifest presence of the Lord of glory results only from deep desire.⁵ This deep desire reveals itself in the Christian by prayer and self-denial.

In His answer to the disciples for their failure to cure the sick boy, Jesus told them in Matthew 17:21:

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

The Church of Jesus Christ today lacks this kind of deep desire for spiritual realities. We talk a good line and profess to apply it in life. We even may adopt these techniques, i. e., prayer and fasting, as a sort of magical formula to follow to get what we want. Then when events turn out to our liking, we praise God for His “answer.”

Such trifling with God reminds me of the occasion in Exodus 32 when the Children of Israel asked Aaron to make them an idol. Moses had gone up the mountain to meet with God. They questioned his return. They asked Aaron to make them a god to signify the one who would go before them. When Aaron explained to Moses the process of the idol, he made it sound like a miracle had occurred. Note his answer in Exodus 32:24:

“And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.”

Yet, the Scriptures record the full truth in Exodus 32.4. Aaron had fashioned it with a tool and shaped the molten gold into a calf. Too often, believers attempt to spiritualize the works of the flesh. God does not. The mere following a Biblical pattern does not authenticate the results. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day provide vivid proof of this truth. They certainly prayed, fasted, and studied the Scriptures. Yet, they missed God completely.

True seeking after God does require prayer and self-denial. It is not a magical formula that you follow. It demands waiting upon God and waiting for God. It relies upon God alone, not any means used to pursue God. It is vital to seek the manifest presence of Christ in our lives and in the midst of the Body of Christ. Jesus gives us the reason in John 15:5:

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Neither individually nor collectively can Christians accomplish God’s purposes without the manifest presence and power of Christ. True seeking after Him will produce evidence of His presence. The Church today desperately needs the revelation of His supernatural authority and ability in at least six areas of spiritual life.

The manifest presence and power of Christ will prove evident in these ways: ⁶

1. the supernatural regeneration of lost souls leading to true trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. The current emphasis of urging people “to decide for Christ” bears little resemblance to true Biblical salvation. Salvation is promoted as a solution to life’s mumps and measles and little more. Life is bad, so why not try Christ? It

- demands no repentance and requires no sacrifice. His presence brings true conviction of sin, repentance, and faith leading to salvation in Christ.
2. Godly saints. The Church today is filled with people who need a concordance and a definition of the Greek original to prove their sainthood. Godliness and holiness have fallen upon hard times. It has virtually no emphasis in either the pulpit or the pew.
 3. Holy Spirit anointed preaching. Few preachers today follow the example of Paul in 2 Corinthians 2. He spoke of resting entirely upon the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, not popular, effective speaking techniques. Worse yet, even fewer people in the pew can discern the difference. spiritual unction in worship. Enthusiasm and excitement
 4. are not spiritual unction. Neither is warm feelings. Again, few can distinguish the difference. His manifest presence brings a heavenliness to worship that surpasses enthusiasm, excitement, and warm feelings.
 5. . the manifestation of Christ's supernatural authority and ability. The truest evidence of the lack of His presence is the absence of the supernatural. Everything about the Church today, even individual Christian lives, can be explained, the surest proof of the need for spiritual revival. The Church today avoids, even sometimes condemns, the supernatural work of Christ.
 6. the demonstration of His divine presence. As so often happens with worship, enthusiasm, excitement, and warm feelings make us feel that Christ has manifested Himself. However, these expressions fall by the wayside when Jesus makes his presence known. Words cannot describe it.

Without question, the Church today, perhaps even you, needs the manifest presence of Christ. Nothing short of spiritual revival will bring it to fruition. He stands ready, willing, and able. We must humble ourselves before Him, seek earnestly His face, and He will answer. Christ will live His life through those who rest in Him.

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Topics for Discussion

1. Explain why the following schemes used in the Church often fail.
 - A. reliance on organization
 - B. dependency upon programs and annual events
 - C. a trust in money
 - D. a trust in goals
 - E. a trust in advertisement

2. “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” (Psalm 34.18). How does this passage reflect upon the Church?
3. Discuss the following statement, “any valid successes of the Church amount to nothing more than the slight twitches of the muscles of a drowsy giant, too sleepy to care.”
4. In what way can prayer and fasting be erroneously used as a sort of magical formula?
5. List evidences of the presence of God in the Church
 - A. supernatural regeneration of lost souls leading to trust in Jesus Christ
 - B. Godly saints
 - C. Holy Spirit anointed preaching
 - D. spiritual heavenliness in worship
 - E. evidence of God’s supernatural authority
 - F. the demonstration of God’s divine presence.

6. Discuss the frequency with which the Church is experiencing these evidences. Do you believe it is possible to experience these evidences? What changes are you willing to allow God make in your life to experience the empowering presence of Jesus Christ?

Topics for application

How can the Holy Spirit apply the(se) truths in your life today?

1. He can reveal to you the truth to believe and obey.
 - A. the true condition of the Church/you
 - B. the need of the Church
 - C. the reality of the indwelling Christ
 - D. the presence of God's power in the believer/Church

2. He can reassure you with these truths.

- A. reaffirmation of the truth
 - B. renewal of faith in Jesus Christ and His indwelling presence and power
 - C. hope for the Church/believers
 - D. relief for the repentant
3. He can require their application in your life.
- A. recognition of the truth
 - B. turning from error
 - C. faith in the truth
 - D. shunning false practices
 - E. conformity of life and practice to the truth
 - a. thought
 - b. word
 - c. deed
 - F. adoration of Christ
4. He can rebuke you of sin.
- A. failure to apply the truth
 - a. unbelief
 - b. disobedience
 - B. conclusions about the Church's/your conduct
 - a. faith/doubt
 - b. obedience/disobedience
 - c. approval/reproof
 - d. innocent/guilty
 - e. humiliation by your sin
 - f. ignorance of the truth
 - C. changes required by the Holy Spirit because of the truth
5. He can reform you from sin.
- A. acknowledgement of your sin
 - B. confession of your impotency/inability
 - C. recognition of God's power
 - D. dealing with God earnestly about His help for you
 - E. trust
 - F. obedience

6. He can revive you unto good works.

I pray that the Holy Spirit has shown you your true condition before God and the necessity of His supernatural work to apply Jesus Christ and these Biblical truths to your life. I pray that the Holy Spirit will apply these Biblical truths in your life. May He come to you in grace and bring a spiritual transformation in your life today.