

**General Topics :: The Modern Church vs. The Early Church**

**The Modern Church vs. The Early Church - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 14:31**

Brothers and Sisters, what do you think of this? I've restated some previous thoughts in a more general way. Does the following make sense to you? If so, how so? If not, why not?...

We Christians live today in a bubble culture of "me." We were taught in government school or by a near-sighted society, that "truth is relative" and "culture is relative." We are all almost completely disconnected from the rest of our world. We are all almost completely disconnected from our history.

The vast majority of us came to Christ through modern Christian denominations, whose faith-traditions are less than a few hundred years old. Most of these denominations were "reactionary-movements", reacting for the most part against either the spiritually dead Roman Catholic Church, or later against some one or another of her many backslidden "daughters".

Some of these reactionary movements jettisoned what they viewed as erroneous "Catholic doctrines" and unnecessary "Catholic externals" at that time. The rest got rid of what they deemed to be erroneous doctrines and unnecessary externals later on. Our faith-traditions are now "stuck", because they refuse to look any further back than their own foundings for guidance in interpreting the Scriptures.

For this very reason, being "conservative" is of no help to our denominations either, due to the very nature of conservatism. Good Bible-believing Christians want to be conservative with the truth they have received from their faith-traditions. But since "conservatism" generally equates change, (any change!), with error, it is almost impossible to go back and correct what is lacking.

Thus, our modern denominations (and by extension we ourselves), have been disconnected from the testimony of the ancient practice and beliefs of the early Christians before A.D. 325.

Doug

**Re: The Modern Church vs. The Early Church - posted by ADisciple (), on: 2011/10/6 14:42**

Dietolive said, "Thus, our modern denominations (and by extension we ourselves), have been disconnected from the testimony of the ancient practice and beliefs of the early Christians before A.D. 325."

The thing is, there was serious departure from "the apostles' doctrine" (as laid out in our New Testament) as early as the second century.

So we can't go by the writings of the early church fathers. We must seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to understand what has been revealed in our canon of Scripture, and return to Him who inspired that.

AD

**Re: - posted by ThyKingCome (), on: 2011/10/6 15:33**

DietoLive,

This has troubled me as well. I keep thinking, we (the Church) seem to be spending so much time and energy into making new Church plants or existing Churches after either what is presently "working" in our modern culture, or "what people want" to have when they come together. Is the church you or I am a part of a copy of another church model? If so, where was that church model copied from? If you trace it all the way back to its original source is it sourced in a denomination that you defined very well as basically emerging from false doctrine and seeking to be separate from the Roman Catholic Church and various unscriptural practices....but in all reality, what is true church model?

I love how Al Whittinghill puts it when he is talking about the Church model. Just as Moses was given the instructions on Mt. Sinai to make the tabernacle "just like the original" and it was to be a copy of the true model in Heaven, shouldn't every church make it their aim to seek to be "just like the original Church"? Isn't that God's way? Didn't He know what He was doing when He planted the 120 in the upper room?

Does God really need our studies, demographics, and carnal advertisement to build His Kingdom? Like brother Ravenhill always says about the early Church - "They didn't have a lot of money, they didn't have stately buildings, they didn't have all of the modern conveniences that we have today but they turned the world upside down!"

Whenever I see a new church on the block advertising that they are "contemporary, casual, and relevant" my stomach churns....what does that mean? I hope to God they are getting their model from Christ and nothing else.

"Bend the Church...save the world" - Evan Roberts

**Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 17:48**

Hi ADisciple,

You wrote:

"The thing is, there was serious departure from "the apostles' doctrine" (as laid out in our New Testament) as early as the second century.

So we can't go by the writings of the early church fathers. We must seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to understand what has been revealed in our canon of Scripture, and return to Him who inspired that."

The Canon of Scripture that we use today was established and finally settled upon by the early Church. The Holy words that we read today were themselves preserved and copied and recopied by the early Church. The Early Church is, in a way, our historical link to the apostles and to our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's quite a conundrum, if they were also responsible at the same time for serious departures from major doctrine, the apostles' doctrine, too, isn't it? Could it be rather, and I am not saying it has to be, but could it be that we might be wrong about some of our doctrines, and they might have actually been the ones who were correct?

Surely they made some mistakes, but just surely, haven't we also, being removed, as we are by almost 2000 years from the apostles? Their being so much closer to the source, the apostles and their direct disciples, shouldn't we give more heed to the witness of the Early Church?

Just my thoughts. In meantime,

Rejoice!

Doug

**Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 17:52**

ThyKingCome -

You said:

"I love how Al Whittinghill puts it when he is talking about the Church model. Just as Moses was given the instructions on Mt. Sinai to make the tabernacle "just like the original" and it was to be a copy of the true model in Heaven, shouldn't every church make it their aim to seek to be "just like the original Church"? Isn't that God's way? Didn't He know what He was doing when He planted the 120 in the upper room?"

what you say makes sense to me. I once was speaking to a Sister about the how the Early Christians met, in comparison to how modern churches meet. Her response to me was

"Our Church doesn't care how it was done in the New Testament..."

**Re: - posted by swornservant, on: 2011/10/6 18:05**

The model for the true church of Jesus Christ is found in the book of Acts. This church was hungry for the truth of the Word of GOD, passionate about the cause of the cross, and willing to live and die for the testimony of the Gospel truth and for the cause of our Savior!!

**Re: - posted by ADisciple (), on: 2011/10/6 20:09**

Doug said, "The Canon of Scripture that we use today was established and finally settled upon by the early Church."

And we are thankful for that.

But as early as the second century, they were missing the mark that is revealed in our canon of Scripture. I am thinking particularly of how quickly the one-bishop system supplanted the order that is revealed in Scripture. Yet many of the "early fathers" endorsed this system. And you know what that led to.

In building anything, you've got to use the original template. If you try to continue building using for your pattern something that was cut from the original template, it could be off a bit. Then using that one for the next cut... eventually you end up way off.

Our Template is what is revealed in the canon of Scripture-- not the way the early fathers interpreted the canon of Scripture.

...In any case, that is what I am going to go by.

AD

**Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/6 20:35**

ADisciple -

You wrote:

"Our Template is what is revealed in the canon of Scripture-- not the way the early fathers interpreted the canon of Scripture.

...In any case, that is what I am going to go by."

Yes, ADisciple, that is what I go by too.

Let me make my point another way:

People read commentaries for help and edification in their understanding. They read bible dictionaries to understand the context of the various books. They hear the Bible taught by teachers in the Church.

All of these are 2000 years after the fact. Might we not learn something from the Early Church too? Especially since they had something pretty important to do with the Bible we use to judge all things by?

**Re: - posted by ADisciple (), on: 2011/10/6 21:02**

Yes, we can learn from them. And what I have learned is that in some respects the early "church fathers" missed the mark. So I am quite guarded as to their teachings. I always go to the Scriptures themselves-- and more-- to Him who inspired the Scriptures for His guidance in helping me understand what He had in mind (as revealed in the Scriptures).

If you can get hold of an old book called *The Churches of God* by G.H. Lang, I highly recommend it. Lang shows clearly (referring to another well-documented book called *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, by Edwin Hatch) that as early as the second century, church leaders had missed God's intended pattern for the order of His churches as revealed in Scripture.

**Re: The Modern Church vs. The Early Church - posted by twayneb (), on: 2011/10/7 9:38**

I think in comparing the modern vs early church we need to be careful not to make some errors in looking at the church merely as a form or a fashion, a way of doing things. The church was never a physical structure but rather a spiritual building.

I do see some definite shortcomings of the American style of "doing church". To me, the pastor down, CEO structure is fraught with problems. It creates an atmosphere where those who are "under" are often vying for position and trying to climb the ladder so that they too can be "spiritual". It is not always a matter of a heart that desires evil things but is often a function of the concept that the really spiritual people are in church leadership positions and we all want to be spiritual. I also see that it fosters a clergy / laity mentality which I believe is not borne out in the NT. I see shortcomings in the board run democratic system as well in which the pastor is a hireling and is under the scrutiny of the board.

Having said that I have also seen some problems with the modern day house church movement. I have seen those who simply don't want to submit themselves to anyone else so they do their own thing.

I am not an early church historian but I have noticed a few things about the early church. It was a people transformed by God, born again, and filled with the Holy Spirit. It was a people who were passionate about their savior. I notice that the church was seen as a universal body of believers and the local expression was the church in a particular geographic area and not the particular group who has rallied around a doctrinal nuance. I see eldership in each city or region. These men were chosen for the same qualities that we find mentioned in Paul's teachings. Their positions were not hierarchical as in a corporation but they did have charge to watch over the flock and to lead the church in the things of God. I see that because of the spiritual qualities in these men that they were worthy to be followed as they followed Christ. So, there was a submission by the body to this God-ordained leadership. In similar fashion each member of the body was submitted to one another in love. They were all in each others' business so to speak as they lived life together and had close and intimate relationship in the Lord. This is what mutual submission looks like. I notice that the church met in peoples' homes most likely because of the atmosphere of persecution and/or the cost of building a structure. It did not seem important to build a building or an organization. People desired to win the lost and build Christ in them. I notice that there were apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists that were given as grace gifts to the body to minister to the body with the end of producing maturity so that the body, fully equipped, could more effectively minister the gospel to the world. These men were sometimes vocational and traveled, but more often than not were resident in the local body functioning as they lived life with the body. The body understood that every joint was necessary to supply its part as it was empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit.

As time went along it seems that the Jews followed the pattern of the synagogue in their churches. Buildings were built and meetings were held in those buildings. I don't think the building is the problem but rather the heart of the people who build it. I don't think home meetings are necessarily more Biblical than meeting in a building but it is the heart of the church that conforms to the Biblical standard or falls short of it.

The thing we must consider is where we are at in relationship to where God would have us be personally. As a teacher in the body I long to see a time when the church in my area would be willing to see the grace gifts given to equip the church operating city wide rather than being confined to one building because "we don't quite see that issue like you do." I would like to see us able to prayerfully come to the Word together to settle doctrinal differences. I would also like to see us be OK with ongoing discussions of things like pre-trib or post-trib as things we don't have to settle today but can still be in intimate fellowship regardless. I am not talking about an ecumenical movement but rather a unity and fellowship of the body of true believers in a city. Obvious heresy and error must be called out and dealt with. But that is what the gifting of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher and the city wide eldership is called to do. That is part of overseeing and equipping.

I am always blessed when I look at the church in areas like North Korea, North Vietnam, Cambodia, China, etc. These people do not divide themselves like we do and their focus is, to me, closer to the focus of the NT church. But then again, we could be in that situation before too many years.

**Re: - posted by dietolive, on: 2011/10/7 12:45**

Good word Brother Travis.

Thank you for taking the time to express your thought. The unity of the faithful...

Take care,  
Doug

**Re: , on: 2011/10/7 14:57**

The best thing to do is get before Jesus and ask how is the Spirit speaking today. We agree the gospel message never changes. The gospel is centered on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the venues of how the gospel is communicated and lived out such as church does change. I am not speaking of the modern church but rather new wine skins to communicate the message and life of the gospel.

Blaine