

General Topics :: Normal Christian Church Life

Normal Christian Church Life - posted by Mattie, on: 2009/8/30 20:57

Excerpts from "the Normal Christian Church Life" by Watchman Nee (excellent read for those who've read the Normal Christian Life)

"Introduction"

"We must realize is that God has incorporated all His children into one Body. He recognizes no division of His people into various "churches" and missions. He has designed that all who are His shall live a corporate life, the life of a body among whose many members there is mutual consideration, mutual love, and mutual understanding. And He has purposed that not only the life, but also the ministry of His children, should be on the principle of the body, that it should be a matter of mutual helpfulness, mutual edification, and mutual service—the activity of the many members of one body."

"If we would understand the will of God concerning His Church, then we must not look to see how He led His people last year, or ten years ago, or a hundred years ago, but we must return to the beginning, to the "genesis" of the Church, to see what He said and did then. It is there we find the highest expression of His will. Acts is the "genesis" of the Church's history, and the Church in the time of Paul is the "genesis" of the Spirit's work. Conditions in the Church today are vastly different from what they were then, but these present conditions could never be our example, or our authoritative guide. We must return to the beginning."

"Chapter 6: The Elders"

"The Word of God uses the term "lead" in connection with the responsibilities of an elder. The ordering of church government, the management of business affairs, and the care of material things are all under their control. But we must remember that a scriptural church does not consist of an active and a passive group of brethren, the former controlling the latter, and the latter simply submitting to their control, or the former bearing all the burden while the latter settle down in ease to enjoy the benefit of their labors. "That the members would...care for one another" is God's purpose for His Church (1 Cor. 12:25). Every church after God's own heart bears the stamp of "one another" on all its life and activity. Mutuality is its outstanding characteristic. If the elders lose sight of that, then their leading the church will soon be changed to lording it over the church. Even while the elders exercise control in church affairs, they must remember that they are only fellow members with the other believers; Christ alone is the Head.

"In Scripture we see that there was always more than one elder or bishop in a local church. It is not God's will that one believer should be singled out from all the others to occupy a place of special prominence, while the others passively submit to his will."

"Chapter 7: The Churches Started by the Apostles"

"To say, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Cephas," is obviously sectarian; but to say, "I am of Christ," is sectarian too, though less obviously so. The confession, "I am of Christ," is good as a confession, but it is not an adequate basis for forming a separate church, since it excludes some of the children of God in a given locality by including only a certain section who say, "I am of Christ." That every believer belongs to Christ is a fact, whether that fact be declared or not; and to differentiate between those who proclaim it and those who do not, is condemned by God as carnal. It is the fact that matters, not the declaration of it. The sphere of a church in any place does not merely include those in that place who say, "I am of Christ," but all in that place who are of Christ. It extends over the entire area of the locality, and includes the entire number of the Christians in the locality."

"There is a beautiful balance in the teaching of God's Word regarding the relationship between the various churches. On the one hand, they are totally independent of one another in matters relating to responsibility, government, and organization. On the other hand, they are to learn from one another and to keep pace with one another. But in everything it is essential to have both the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the pattern in God's Holy Word."

"In the history of the Church it has frequently happened that when God has given special light or experience to any individual, that individual has stressed the particular truth revealed or experienced, and gathered round him people who appreciate it."

ciated his teaching, with the result that the leader, or the truth he emphasized, has become the ground of fellowship. Thus sects have multiplied. If God's people could only see that the object of all ministry is the founding of local churches and not the grouping of Christians around any particular individual, or truth, or experience, or under any particular organization, then the forming of sects would be avoided. We who serve the Lord must be willing to let go our hold upon all those to whom we have ministered, and let all the fruits of our ministry pass into local churches governed entirely by local men."

"Chapter 8: The Basis of Union & Division"

"How are we going to determine who are our brothers and our fellow members in the Church of God? Not by inquiring if they hold the same doctrinal views that we hold, or have had the same spiritual experiences; nor by seeing if their customs, manner of living, interests, and preferences tally with ours. We merely inquire, Are they indwelt by the Spirit of God or not?"

"Hero worship is a tendency of human nature, which delights to show preference for those who appeal to its tastes. Because so many of God's children know little or nothing of the power of the cross to deal with the flesh, this tendency to worship a man has expressed itself frequently in the Church of God, and much havoc has been wrought in consequence. It is in keeping with God's will that we should learn from spiritual men and profit by their leadership, but it is altogether contrary to His will that we should divide the Church according to the men we admire."

"All believers living in the same locality belong to the same church."

"If our hearts are set to preserve the local character of the churches of God, we cannot fail to come up against problems in our work. Unless the cross operates mightily, what endless possibilities of friction there will be if we include in one church all the believers in the locality with all their varying views. How the flesh would like just to include those holding the same views, and to exclude all whose views differ from ours. To have constant and close association with people whose interpretation of Scripture does not tally with ours, is hard for the flesh, but good for the spirit. God does not use division to solve the problem; He uses the cross. "

"Chapter 9: The Work & the Churches"

"God's servants must work together in companies, but there is a kind of co-working which is to be avoided, that is, co-working in a man-made organization which restricts its members so that they cannot really respond to the leading of the Spirit. When workers are entirely subject to the direction of men, then their work is not the outcome of a spiritual burden placed on them by God, but merely the doing of a piece of work in response to the dictates of those holding higher positions than they. The trouble today is that men are taking the place of the Holy Spirit, and the will of men in official position is taking the place of the will of God. Workers have no direct knowledge of the divine will, but simply do the will of those in authority over them, without bearing any personal burden from the Lord for His work."

"The teaching of God's Word is that, on the one hand, human organizations must not control the servants of God; on the other hand, His servants must learn to submit to a spiritual authority which is based on the difference of ministry. There is no organized cooperation, yet there is a spiritual fellowship and a spiritual oneness. Individualism and human organization alike are out of line with the will of God. We should seek to know His will, not independently, but in conjunction with the other ministering members of the Body."

"Chapter 12: The Local Church"

"Another thing which is considered of vital importance to the existence of a church is a church building. The thought of a church is so frequently associated with a church building, that the building itself is often referred to as "the church." But in God's Word it is the living believers who are called the church, not the bricks and mortar (see Acts 5:11; Matt. 18:17). According to Scripture it is not even necessary for a church to have a place definitely set apart for fellowship. The Jews always had their special meeting places, and wherever they went they made a point of building a synagogue in which to worship God. The first apostles were Jews, and the Jewish tendency to build special places of worship was natural to them. Had Christianity required that places be set apart for the specific purpose of worshipping the Lord, the early apostles, with their Jewish background and natural tendencies, would have been ready enough to build them. The amazing thing is that, not only did they not put up special buildings, but they seem to have ignored the whole subject intentionally. It is Judaism, not Christianity, which teaches that there must be sanctified places for divine worship. The temple of the New Testament is not a material edifice; it consists of living persons, all believers in the Lord"

"Christ is the Head of the Church and "we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (Rom. 12:5). Apart from Christ, the Church has no head; all believers are only members, and they are "members one of another." Mutuality expresses the nature of the Church, for all the relationships among believers are of one member to another, never of a head to the members. All those who compose a church take their place as members of the Body, not one occupying the position of head. The whole life of the church, and all its activities, must be stamped by this characteristic of mutuality."

Re: Normal Christian Church Life - posted by Leo_Grace, on: 2009/8/30 21:17

Thank you. Beautiful post. It makes abundantly clear how far modern Christianity has drifted away from the concept of church as inspired by God and practiced by first generation Christians.

Would that all the pastors and modern church authorities who visit this site read and repent. The dislike of modern Christianity by young Americans is totally understandable, seeing the insincerity, hypocrisy, and artificiality of today's "churches", and how they subscribe to man-made customs and practices rather than the true teachings of Christ.

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2009/8/31 5:50

"The amazing thing is that, not only did they not put up special buildings, but they seem to have ignored the whole subject intentionally. It is Judaism, not Christianity, which teaches that there must be sanctified places for divine worship. The temple of the New Testament is not a material edifice; it consists of living persons, all believers in the Lord"

Thank you Mattie for posting this. All of Watchman Nee's books on the Church are excellent. We have to get back to seeing Christ as the head of the Church, not the pastor. May the Lord open our eyes to see that it is Christ that is building His Church, and that the Church is the Body of Christ, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.

Mike

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/8/31 6:41

Definitely a worthy read. It has been a while since I've read this book, and some of it at the time went over my head as I was not personally ready to receive many of the precious insights Watchman Nee taught in this book. This is definitely his best book on the church I've read to date, and I believe the church would do well to take much of it to heart. Sadly, most denominations will utterly ignore this book, as the book is a threat to its very existence.

With that said, however, I do offer some words of caution in this book. Some of that is a caution not so much against the book as it is the individual reading the book, as one could easily distort some of the things in this book to the hurt of others. At the same time though, there are some inconsistencies in this book, and I believe Nee though trying to avoid causing division on many levels, ultimately creates such divisions in regard to some positions he takes. One might deny such, but such is a naivety that clearly ignores "the local church" denomination he founded.

Though taken to another level altogether by false prophets like his co-worker Witness Lee after his imprisonment and death, Nee taught and practiced a doctrine that ignored other Christian churches in a locale, and dismissed them as being valid churches altogether. He pretty much insisted the churches he started were the only valid church in a locale, because all others met under the banner of a denomination and senior pastor, whereas his met under the headship of Jesus Christ alone. While I appreciate what he was attempting to do here, this clearly falls into the error he warns against of dividing over being "of Christ." While he would fellowship with other brethren in a locale, he would have nothing to do whatsoever with any other church that existed in whatever city he was in.

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2009/8/31 7:41

Quote:

"One might deny such, but such is a naivety that clearly ignores "the local church" denomination he founded."

Brother, I have to disagree with you here. Watchman Nee did not establish any denomination. He was totally against denominationalism.

Quote:

"He pretty much insisted the churches he started were the only valid church in a locale, because all others met under the

banner of a denomination and senior pastor, whereas his met under the headship of Jesus Christ alone."

Brother, The early church had no other head other than Jesus Christ. The Apostles never did claim to be the head of the Church. It is unlike many churches today, where the pastor claims to be the head (CEO) of the local church that he is overseeing.

Mike

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2009/8/31 9:53

Quote:

Watchman Nee did not establish any denomination. He was totally against Denominationalism.

By refusing to acknowledge other churches in a city, he did start a denomination. He called it, "the local church." Of course, Witness Lee took it much further than Nee ever did. But they do have a headquarters in California. They swear up and down they are not a denomination. But, the Assemblies of God says the same of themselves. "We are a movement, not a denomination," is their motto.

Quote:

Brother, The early church had no other head other than Jesus Christ. The Apostles never did claim to be the head of the Church. It is unlike many churches today, where the pastor claims to be the head (CEO) of the local church that he is overseeing.

No doubt, and I long for us to return as a church to this precious insight and practical reality. But just because another local church in your city might have these trappings doesn't invalidate them as a genuine church. To say otherwise is to fall into the very error Nee warned about saying, "I am of Christ." As much as it is needed that we gather under the headship of Christ as a fellowship, this does not permit us to become divisive as Nee was.

Re: - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2009/8/31 13:33

Quote:

-----They swear up and down they are not a denomination

And there are others like this. The Church of Christ will argue this point as well, and they are just one.

BTW, the real strict Amish will agree with this position about church houses. I have never seen where this policy enhanced ones walk with the LORD. Or, maybe, I am ignorant?

Blessings,
ginnyrose

Re: - posted by Mattie, on: 2009/8/31 14:02

We need to see the church the way Jesus sees His church... period.

We need to allow Him to build His church the way He intended, for He said 'I will build My church' (Matt 16:18)

We can get caught up in a lot of debate over Nee's views on things, but let's look at the Scriptures for ourself to make a proper judgment.

There is only one body and one Spirit (Eph 4:4).

The church is not a building, but a people called out (Matt 16:18)

Christ is the Head, and not any man or organization. We are members of one another through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) (Ephesians 4:16).

Let's weigh the truth of this reality with what we see today - --*men/organizations have become 'heads' of the church;
*the church is often seen as a building we meet in rather than the people we gather with;
*there are thousands of denominations, all gathering around their 'truth' that makes them distinct from others
*men and ministries are becoming the greater focus than the Person of Jesus Christ dwelling in and among His people

This is the truth we must return to. Nee is an imperfect vessel, but he had made valid points concerning the role of the church in 1st century vs. today. We would do well to take heed to it.

Re: - posted by MaryJane, on: 2009/8/31 14:14

Greetings Mattie

You wrote: There is only one body and one Spirit (Eph 4:4).

The church is not a building, but a people called out (Matt 16:18)

Christ is the Head, and not any man or organization. We are members of one another through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12) (Ephesians 4:16).

Can I just say AMEN! I agree with what you shared and wanted to say thanks for having the courage in Christ to post! I hope you don't mind if I share this here as well, thought it fit the topic:-)

God Bless
maryjane

Christianity is Not a Religion, Nor a Holy Day Meeting

Christianity is not a religion, nor a holy day meeting: "Suppose Christianity is not a religion but a way of life, a falling in love with God, and, through Him, a falling in love with our fellows. Of course, such a way is hard and costly, but it is also joyous and rewarding even in the here-and-now. People who follow that Way know beyond all possible argument that they are in harmony with the purpose of God, that Christ is with them and in them as they set about His work in our disordered world. If anyone thinks this is perilous and revolutionary teaching, so much the better. That is exactly what they thought of the teaching of Jesus Christ. The light He brought to bear upon human affairs is almost unbearably brilliant: but it is the light of Truth, and in that light human problems can be solved."—J. B. Phillips (1906-1982), When God Was Man

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2009/8/31 14:57

Quote:

"By refusing to acknowledge other churches in a city, he did start a denomination. He called it, 'the local church.' Of course, Witness Lee took it much further than Nee ever did. But they do have a headquarters in California. They swear up and down they are not a denomination. But, the Assemblies of God says the same of themselves. 'We are a movement, not a denomination,' is their motto."

Watchman Nee acknowledged the Church in every city, which is the Body of believers in that city. He refused to acknowledge the man made structures. He only acknowledged churches that were built on the ground of Christ. There is only one foundation that the Church can be built on and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. A church that is built on any other ground is not the true church, although it may contain believers that make up the true church.

Mike

Re: - posted by AbideinHim (), on: 2009/8/31 16:10

From "The Normal Christian Church Life" - Watchman Nee

Non-sectarianism. Some Christians think they know better than to say, "I am of Cephas," or, "I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollos." They say, "I am of Christ." Such Christians despise the others as sectarian, and on that ground start another community. Their attitude is: You are sectarian. I am non-sectarian. You are hero-worshippers, we worship the Lord alone.

But God's Word does not only condemn those who say, "I am of Cephas," "I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollos." It just as definitely and just as clearly denounces those who say, "I am of Christ." It is not wrong to reckon oneself as belonging only to Christ. It is right and even essential. Nor is it wrong to repudiate all schism amongst the children of God; it is highly commendable. God does not condemn this class of Christians for either of these two things; He condemns them for the very sin they condemn in others - their sectarianism. As a protest against division among the children of God; many believers seek to divide those who do not divide as from those who do, and never dream that they themselves are divisive. Their ground of division may be more plausible than that of others who divide on the ground of doctrinal differences or personal preference for certain leaders, but the fact remains that they are dividing the children of God. Even while they repudiate schism elsewhere, they are schismatic themselves.

You say, "I am of Christ." Do you mean to say others are not? It is perfectly legitimate for you to say, "I am of Christ" if your remark merely implies to whom you belong; but if it implies, "I am not sectarian; I stand quite differently from you sectarians," then it is making a difference between them and other Christians. The very thought of distinguishing between the children of God has its springs in the carnal nature of man and is sectarian.

What then is right? All exclusiveness is wrong. All inclusiveness (of true children of God) is right. Denominations are not Scriptural and we ought to have no part in them, but if we adopt an attitude of criticism and think, They are denominational: I am undenominational; they belong to sects, I belong to Christ alone - such differentiating is definitely sectarian.

Yes, praise God, I am of Christ, but my fellowship is not merely with those who say, "I am of Christ," but with all who are of Christ. I do not so much mind what they say, but I very much mind what they are. I do not enquire whether they are denominational or undenominational, sectarian or unsectarian. I only enquire, Are they of Christ? If they are of Christ, then they are my brethren.

Our personal standing should be undenominational, but the basis of our fellowship is not undenominationalism. We ourselves should be non-sectarian, but we dare not insist on non-sectarianism as a condition of fellowship. Our only ground of fellowship is Christ. Our fellowship must be with all the believers in a locality, not merely with all the unsectarian believers in that locality. They may make denominational differences, but we must not make undenominational requirements. Their denominationalism or sectarianism will mean that severe limitations are imposed upon the Lord as to His purpose and mind for them, and this will mean that they will never go beyond a certain measure of spiritual growth and fullness. Blessing there may be, but fullness of divine purpose never.

When we come to a place where Christ is not named, we must preach the Gospel, win men to the Lord, and found a local church. If we come to a place where there are already Christians but on various grounds these believers separate themselves into denominational "churches," our task is just the same as in the other place - we must preach the Gospel, lead men to the Lord, and form them into a church on the scriptural ground of locality. All the while we must maintain an attitude of inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, towards those believers who are in different sects, for they, as we are children of God, and they live in the same locality, therefore they belong to the same church as we do. For ourselves, we cannot join any sect or remain in one, for our church connection can only be on local ground. Let us be clear on this point, that an undenominational church is not a local church. There is a vast difference between the two. A local church is undenomi

national and it is positive and inclusive, but an undenominational church is not a local church, and it is negative and exclusive.

Let us be clear as to our position. We are not out to establish undenominational churches but local churches. We are seeking to do a positive work. If believers can be led to see what a local church is - the expression of the Body of Christ in a locality - they will certainly not remain in any sect. On the other hand it is possible for them to see all the evils of sectarianism, and leave them, without knowing what a local church is.

I do not condone sectarianism and I do not believe we should belong to any sect, but it is not our business to get people to leave them. If we make it our chief concern to lead people to a real knowledge of the Lord and the power of His Cross, then they will gladly abandon themselves to Him and will learn to walk in the Spirit, repudiating the things of the flesh. We shall find there will be no need to stress the question of denominations, for the Spirit Himself will enlighten them. If a believer has not learned the way of the Cross and the walk in the Spirit, what is gained by his coming out of a sect?

Re: - posted by murrcoir (), on: 2009/9/1 5:44

1 Corinthians 3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Why is there divisions in the church because of carnality

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

Carnality.