



Articles and Sermons :: A Model Church

A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/17 3:04

A Model Church

CHURCH PEOPLE IMITATE MODELS, and Christians have had a habit of going off on tangents, following moods, models and habits. We wish it were different, but down the years we have been like a flock of sheep, everybody following everybody else. We have models and we follow them. The church tends to decline in moral power if it chooses the wrong model or an inadequate model. Now don't interrupt me by saying, "Jesus is our model." I know that He is our model—He ought to be our model. But the simple fact is that He is not. He ought to be the model for the churches, but Jesus Christ has about as much authority in the average Protestant church as I have in the average Catholic church.

I heard about a scientist, Jean Henri Fabre, studying one of the species of caterpillars. He got a huge round vessel, a large crock, and put a lot of caterpillars called army worms around the outside bumper-to-bumper. Then he started them moving. Actually he didn't have to start them—they are called army worms because they are always marching. As far as Fabre could tell, no caterpillar knew where it was going: It was following the tail of the one ahead of it, and the one that was after it followed its tail. Each followed the one ahead until they got clear around to the original one that was following the tail of the one ahead of it. Around and around the crock they went. In nature, army worms march across and through the woods and forest and bushes in a straight line. But because they had been tricked and put on a circular path, they went around and around until one after another they fell off.

In the United States I can take you to beautiful little churches with the doors nailed up—all of those blessed religious army worms that once went around in a circle fell off and were buried in the backyard. Now there is nobody there; they have all fallen off. They ran around, chased each other and took each other for models. Now it is all over and there is nothing left but gravestones, green briars, bats and memories.

The Thessalonian church had taken the right models. Their models were God and Paul the apostle. Because they had taken the right models, other people took them for a model. Paul was proud and happy that other people—including the Macedonians and Achaians—were talking about the Christians at Thessalonica. He said, "Your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:8b-9).

The church at Thessalonica was a model church, and I want it to be the pattern for our church. We are to be a model church, a church that people, when they hear about it, will say is a Christian church if ever one was.

If people will follow other people, then they ought to follow the right kind of people in the right direction. If religious people will parade, then we ought to get them parading in the right way. To a large extent evangelicals have been given wrong models. While we talk about the Lord Jesus and fight for the creeds that say He is the Lord of Glory, He has very little to say among us. Who even pretends to obey the Sermon on the Mount? Some dispensationalists have even ruled it out, so it is not even theologically necessary to believe it anymore. It belongs to some other dispensation. That kind of rules out the whole business. Who even pretends to obey the First Corinthians epistle dealing with marriage, litigation and the Lord's Supper?

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/17 9:57

Features of a model church

The model church must embody certain features. An important one is following the order of the New Testament by letting Scripture decide matters.

I knew a man from India who got hold of a New Testament, was converted and started to preach, but he had no background at all. That is, he started from scratch. He did not have a Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholic or Protestant background. He just started from the beginning. He didn't know anything about churches. He testified, "What I did when I had a problem in the church was to go straight to the New Testament and settle it. I let the New Testament tell me what I was to

o do.Â” The result was that God greatly blessed him and his work in the land of India. This is what I would like to see in our church— the New Testament order of letting Scripture decide matters. When it comes to a question— any question— what does the Word of God say? All beliefs and practices should be tested by the Word; no copying unscriptural church methods. We should let the Word of God decide.

I would also have in our body the power of the Spirit of Christ. I have said that the average gospel church could get along without the Holy Spirit— and many do. We are praying for revival. What is revival? It is when the Holy Spirit takes over the work that is His, instead of being pushed aside into the benediction. He now becomes the Chief Executive of the church, running it. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8a). That means that the Spirit of heaven should come to a company on earth with His all-prevailing gifts, power and grace, with His life, His illumination and His discernment. This is not fanaticism; this is not any weird religion. This is just what the Bible teaches. As a church we must also embody in a supreme degree the purposes for which we exist. There are three purposes for which we exist on earth: to worship, to witness and to work. When people are converted they immediately change their citizenships. They are no longer citizens of earth except in a provisory way. They are now citizens of heaven. Abraham, when he went down from Ur of the Chaldees, was called a Hebrew, a man from the other side of the river, a stranger. He spoke with an accent. He brought different habits: eating habits, dressing habits, speech habits and other customs. He brought them from Ur of the Chaldees. He was a different man, a stranger and a foreigner there.

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/17 12:37

We immediately switch citizenship

Christians, when they are born of God, immediately shift their citizenships and become pilgrims and strangers where they used to be citizens. “I am a stranger here/ upon a foreign land/ my home is far away/ beyond the golden strand,” we used to sing. Why then does God leave us here? Why are we here at all? All who are born anew have new natures. God becomes our Father and Jesus becomes our Brother, we become the habitation of the Spirit and heaven is our fatherland. Why then are we left here on earth among strangers? We are left here to worship, to witness and to work. Those three things are what we are here for.

We are here to worship

Our worship must be in the Spirit. Jesus said, “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To worship in such a way that God will accept it, there must be individual committal to Christ and inward purification by blood and fire. There must be separation from the world, from its opinions, habits and values. But right now we are just coming out of a period when people were so eager to make converts that they fell into a trap that Jesus Christ warned them about. He said, “You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matthew 23:15b).

We are just coming through that period when John 3:16 was the only verse anybody used. The Lord loves everybody. Come, come, come; everybody get converted. So people came, but their conversions were backward. In place of the people being converted into the kingdom of God, the church was converted over to their habits and ways. There was no separation from the world; the world’s opinions and habits came into the church.

Do you want God to bless you? You say, “We want God to bless us. We believe the Lord is coming.” Did you read the Bible or watch TV more this week? Think of the time you have spent. How many half-hour periods did you spend with your Bible, and how many did you spend with amusements? We do not take our faith seriously enough.

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/17 16:30

We are here to witness

We are here to worship; we are here to get rid of the habits and values of the world; and we are here to witness. What is a witness? A witness is somebody who testifies to a personal experience. Have you ever thought of the unscriptural, hopeless situation we are in now in evangelical churches? The preacher is the only soul-winner. If he does not come through and win souls, the church declines. The Lord never meant it to be so. He meant that everybody should be a witness. What should we be witnesses to? We are witnesses only to our personal experiences. Go into a court of law and say, “Well, Aunt Mabel told me” and they will shut you up immediately. We do not care what Aunt Mabel said. What do you know? What did you see? What did you feel? What did you hear? What did you taste? What came within the confines of

your personal experience? The Lord says, "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8b). Go tell everybody. But suppose somebody says, "How do you know?" Then we can smile and say, "I was there—I know." I was converted, and I know I was converted. I was present, so I know. Nobody can argue me out of it. When I was young, I used to read books dealing with atheism. I tried to acquaint myself as best I could with everything that was against Christianity. I deliberately bought and read books aimed to prove that Christianity was not true, that the Bible was a hoax, that Jesus Christ was a myth and that the whole thing was subjective self-deception. When I had read the books I could not answer them. I did not know how to answer them, but I knew one thing. "Hold on a minute," I would say to the authors. "I happen to know. I was there. You are trying to argue me down by reasoning, but I can tell you by experience that I know." More than one time, I got on my knees and with tears near the surface worshiped Jesus Christ, God's Son. I did not know the answers to their arguments, but I knew the One against whom they were arguing. A witness is somebody who has been there and who knows by experience.

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/18 0:40

We are here to work

The third reason we are in the world is to do good works. They call that benevolence in the churches. A fellow drives up in an expensive car, his wife gets out wearing a genuine fur coat, he parks and finally wanders in wearing a fine wool suit. The church members pass around a plate for benevolence and he puts in a dime. We owe the world good works. God anointed Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit and power, and Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil. Jesus did good works and said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21b). You and I are in the world not to put a thin, apologetic dime in the basket, but we are here to share with others around the world.

I pray to God Almighty that I may not live my life out and when I am gone not have anybody sorry I went. It is entirely possible. Doing good works is not just benevolence, either. It is doing good works for Jesus Christ's sake. That is why you are left here. Otherwise you would be in heaven, sitting around tuning your harp. Instead you are down here doing good works.

How do I do good works? I do them by prayer and by my money. There is a beautiful passage where Jesus tells a parable and then explains it. He says, "Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9b). The stingiest old miser that ever lived only needs two pennies when he is dead—one for each eye. In other words, by the right and generous use of my money I can bless people whom I have never seen. When the end comes and money does not help me anymore, there will be people there and God will say to them, "This is the man who kept you two years when you were a displaced child over there. His money helped you." They never knew who it was. Good works are beautiful, and churches ought to be doing them.

Is it fanaticism that a church ought to worship, to witness and to work? I do not think so. If we do those three things rightly we will have very little time left for anything else.

Suppose someone asks, "What do you do?" There are all sorts of things you can do. You can pray and you can watch for God's providential openings. You can do good works and follow Jesus who was anointed with the Holy Spirit to do good works.

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/18 9:35

Must be a change in way of life

Here is what grieves me, and I believe this also grieves the Holy Spirit: My hearers rise to this call emotionally, but they will not confirm it by a corresponding change in their way of life. Their goodness is like the morning clouds—by 9:00 o'clock the sun has burnt off the fog. This is what happens to many people's good intentions. They rise emotionally to an urgent message that we become a New Testament church, that we become a model church, that we have the order of the New Testament and the power of the Holy Spirit in order that we might worship, work and witness. Emotionally they rise to it, but they will not confirm their emotions by corresponding changes in their way of life.

They want to be blessed by God, but they want God to bless them on their terms. They look pensively to God for victory, but they will not bring their giving into line. They will not practice family prayer, rushing off without it. They will not take time for secret prayer and will not forgive those who have wronged them. They will not seek to be reconciled to those with

whom they have quarreled. They will not pick up their crosses and say, "Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow Thee."

What is going to bring about the model church? Do you think that it ever can come within a church? Is there too much dead wood? Are there too many wrong directions, or too many things wrong with us? Are we like an old person who has every organ in the body gone bad? The doctor looks the person over and says, "There is nothing I can do for you. Go home and wait." Are we like that? Or is there hope?

I believe there is hope. It is going to cost a little bit. In fact, it is going to cost quite a bit. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24b). It is never fun carrying a cross. Isn't it strange that Jesus made a bloody, pain-filled cross a symbol of His religion?

Modern churches have made fun a symbol of their religion. I want to grieve, bury my head in my hands and sob before God when I hear, as I often do, precious young people whom I would give my blood for, get up and in a little tiny voice say, "Oh, I am so glad I have found out that you do not have to be a sinner to have fun. We have fun in the church, too. You can follow Jesus and have fun." Then they sit down. How they have been betrayed! It is the cross that is the symbol of the Christian life. But we will not pick up our cross. We will not forgive our enemies. We will not be reconciled.

Re: A Model Church - posted by lwpray (), on: 2004/11/18 12:40

A raking of carnal dead leaves

The average church is simply a raking together of carnal, dead leaves, without any life. We organize it, give to support it and keep it up. Still we have nothing but carnal leaves that will burn in hell in the days before us when our Lord returns. I believe there is hope, and I believe there is a lot of it. It is going to take a bit of grit and determination and a good deal of prayer and cross-bearing. But we will have God on our side, and I would rather have God on my side than all the armies of the world. He will confirm the word of His servant; He will perform the counsel of His messenger. "I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16b).

He will give fruit if we will but trust Him and dare to believe. Have you got the Christian courage to change your home to suit the will of God? Have you got the Christian courage to bring your business into line with the will of God? Have you got the Christian courage to bring your personal life into line with the will of God, to purge everything that is not of God? We have yet to know how desperately we need God to do something in this terrible day in which we live, a day of worldliness, carnality, competition and vainglory. How we need God; how we need Christ; how we need the Holy Spirit. We need clean living, sanctification and purity of heart. Then the Spirit of the Living God will come upon us.

Some say, "This is a gloomy business you are preaching." When the Moravians went through this, they were anointed of God. Historians said of them that they went out from the church not knowing whether they were still on earth or had already died and gone to heaven. The joy of the Lord was radiantly beautiful upon them, and they became happy people.

"John Wesley," Dr. Johnson said, "was the greatest example of sheer moral happiness that I ever knew." I am not preaching a gloomy religion to you. I am only telling you there must be a new direction set. We must seek the Lord. One glimpse of His face will take away all our carnal desires for anything less than that.

Then the hungry-hearted, the thirsty, the disillusioned, the disappointed and the sick will come our way. They will come because they will want to come, and they will know why they are coming. They will not come because a person invited them but because of Christ Jesus. The church will begin to grow. It will grow in power, in grace, in numbers, in usefulness, in prestige and in influence. Everybody will know it is the church that the Lord has blessed.

As written in Isaiah 60, God said about Jerusalem, in effect, "I am going to bless you. I am going to put a crown on you and I am going to send my blessings over you like doves to their nest. Everybody that passes by will point and say 'That is the city which the Lord has blessed.'" That is what I want to see in our church. We should become the kind of church that the Lord has blessed. This is the reformation necessary within Protestantism.

God has His seed of survival. He has His people who are ready to say, "God, we want to have biblical order, and we want to have the power of the Holy Spirit. We want to fulfill Your will in worship, witness and work. We are willing to back up our desires by carrying the cross and by bringing our lives into line with Your desires."