

Counting Heads

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Jesus said, “By their fruits you will know them.” (Mt. 7:20) One of the most obvious features of any particular “church” can be used to easily and immediately assess its character and quality. To examine this feature requires no spiritual discernment whatsoever – yet many “church” leaders who routinely examine this feature about their own “church” seem unable to grasp the spiritual significance of what their examination reveals. Those who are able to grasp the truth will not long be able to remain a “church” leader or else they will suffer tremendously as they kick long and hard against the goads of truth.

To examine this feature, one need only be able to count heads. Determine the number of people who routinely attend the “church” in question, especially the Sunday “services.” Is it 500? 1,000? 10,000? 50,000? Then list and count the people involved in the “ministries” – drugs and alcohol addiction recovery, homeless, divorced, elderly, shut-ins, men’s/women’s ministry, etc. – but especially notice and count those who attend any prayer meetings. Compare these two numbers. Divide the latter number by the former number and this percentage will tell much of the story of this particular “church.” Some “pastors” will ridicule those *other* “churches” where ten percent of the people do one hundred percent of the work (the so-called “ten percent church rule”) yet some of these “pastors” who mock the others preside over “churches” that can’t even muster *five percent* - and they cannot see this truth for what it is even when it is presented to them in black and white! No further evidence of the blinding work of the demonic needs to be presented. This is clearly the blind leading blind followers toward an eternal ditch (Mt. 15:14) and one should make one’s escape at the first opportunity.

Why does this percentage number tell us so much about the life and health of a particular assembly? The Sunday “services” (which cannot be found anywhere in the New Testament and those elements which can be found are subtly redefined and malpracticed) make no requirement upon the people. One does not need to be born again (Jn. 3:3), nor baptized in water nor by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), nor produce any evidence that God’s Spirit is residing within (Jn. 14:16-17) in order to be a welcome passive listener at these staged events. But there are several discrepancies between the modern Sunday morning “church” “service” practice and the pages of the New Testament, some of which are more significant than others. Equally obvious, each individual “church” will vary in regard to how and to what length or extremity each factor is practiced.

	<u>New Testament</u>	<u>Modern “Church”</u>
Preaching	- Face to face dialogue - Level, eye to eye	- Monologue from a “pulpit” - Audience seated at a man’s feet
Status	- Equals	- Superiors and inferiors (“clergy” and “laity”)
Order	- Christ the administrator of the sanctuary (the people – Heb. 8:2, 1 Cor. 3:16)	- “Liturgy” or order of “service”
Inclusion	- Based on new life from above (Jn. 3:3, 5) - Evidenced by fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)	- “Membership to local club or franchise under “bylaws” - “Tithing” (membership dues)

Worship	- Literally, “bend the knee” - Obedience and reverence for God	- Singing
Message	- <i>Go</i> and make disciples (Mt. 28:19) - Obey and fear God (Heb. 5:9, Rev. 14:6-7)	- <i>Come</i> , hear our guy and see what we do - Do as much or as little for God as you want to
Focus	- The gospel of the kingdom (<i>His</i> body, <i>His</i> kingdom)	- Personal salvation (<i>my</i> needs, <i>my</i> journey)

At the least, the best the Sunday “service” crowd can be called is a mixed multitude, thus making it very different from the original concept of ekklesia which was comprised *only* of those who have been called out of this world’s darkness and transferred into Christ’s kingdom of light. (Col. 1:13)

But when one considers participating in the other “ministries,” one is immediately confronted with requirements. The first requirement one must meet is desire to do the “ministry” – either the love of Christ or the guilt pressure or promise of eternal rewards the “church” puts on its members will compel the individual to participate in doing the work of the ministry. Obviously, the love of Christ instilled within the heart of the individual worker is the godly and most desired attribute, but the “church,” because it must have at least some tangible actions it can point to in order to justify its existence, will compensate for its lack of the genuine spiritual giftings that God gave so that the saints would be equipped to do the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), by using manipulation, guilt- and fear-inducing threats and/or extravagant promises.

Not only does one need the love of Christ to truly do the work of the ministry, one also needs His personal assurances that He has called one to a particular avenue of service. Without these assurances, the “church” must put forth a great deal of external pressure in order to motivate the people to rush in where even angels might fear to tread. There is a curious dichotomy about “church” “ministries” however. It is in the midst of these imitations of real service that one is most likely to encounter something of the real Christ, most often more so than what one encounters in a routine “church” “service.” Whether it is the genuine need and faith of the people being served that brings Him forth or just the simple fact that there was enough sincerity in the heart of the worker to reward as the worker stepped out in enough faith to attempt “the work of the Lord,” either way, Jesus will always show up where there is any kind of mixture of need and genuine faith (Mt. 18:20) and in spite of how deep or extreme the deceptions in either the worker or the needy person may go.

And how could it truly be otherwise? God, for the time being, has chosen to use no other “personnel pool” to draw from except flawed, errant human beings, the only kind on the planet. If Jesus did not “ignore” for the moment the deceptions the workers were under, the person with the need would receive absolutely nothing from Him and the schemes of the realm of death and darkness would prevail entirely. (see however Mt. 16:18) At the least, the worker still has future opportunity to repent of submitting to deception and the needy recipient can be later led on into further light simply because he or she received some genuine impartation of Christ through the worker who was at least in the right place at the right time on that particular day.

So what the percentage of active workers for the Lord really shows us is a rough estimation of how many who attend the “church” in question have actually received a genuine, “working” implantation of Christ in their hearts. As in the parable of the sower, the word can be implanted in the heart (the soil) but yet not grow or mature enough to produce a harvest. (Mt.

13:20-22) The number of people producing a harvest tells us both how well we are implanting the seed and how careful we are to see to it that we are implanting in good soil. When our “church” produces far more unfruitful “starts” and even weeds (tares – Mt. 13:38), then we must face the reality that we are doing far more for the kingdom of darkness than for the kingdom of light. To see the vast difference between the work of Christ and the “church,” we need only compare our five to ten percent number from the “church” in question with Christ’s statement, “Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.” (Jn. 17:12) This would give Christ a 92% (the twelve) or a 99% (the twelve plus the seventy) **retention** rate when we subject His work to this same kind of analysis whereas the “church” **loses** 90 to 95% of its people!

In all fairness, much of the real work of the Lord is done in our hearts and in our families and *then* boils over into the other avenues the “church” labels as “ministries.” So there will be a portion of people “invisibly” impacted and changed by Christ under even the most severely-demonized preaching of gospel truths. But this will not be enough of a factor to excuse an abysmally low percentage of genuine workers doing the work of the ministry. This factor of genuine believers performing the work of the ministry balances against the factor that some workers do their “ministry” out of wrong motives and spiritual sources, leaving us with our original percentage number as a fairly accurate portrayal of spiritual realities among the people.

Paul wrote, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and who lead you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” (1 Ths. 5:12-13) Though “pastors” love to apply this verse to themselves and their work in the “pulpit” and “church,” and this verse has been improperly translated as a justification for lording over other believers (compare Mt. 20:25-26, etc.), the truth is the work of any man who steps up on a stage elevates himself in the eyes of the people and he stands between the people and God, he steals attention from God for himself and he satisfies his own needs and desires to be significant in the eyes of others. Those who have a true calling in their life to preach feel and suffer under the dichotomy the “church” puts on them whether they can understand or articulate their predicament or not (which, most often, they could not, even if they knew anyone in whom they might confide.) This is a significant source of what is called “pastoral burn-out.”

Jesus said, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” (Jn. 7:24) Men see all the outward busy-ness and activities and conclude that God must be pleased. But when we submit to the mind and Spirit of Christ, we begin to see the rampant carnality for what it truly is, enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7) We will begin to see that most people, especially the Sunday “services” mixed multitude, attend the “church” that preaches the “gospel” that corresponds to their own preferences and preconceived notions that satisfies their desires for particular kinds of “ministry” (children’s, youth, elderly, their own particular life situation, etc.) and not because God desires or commends them to attend – and we will begin to recognize that as lawlessness, what is right in one’s own eyes, and we will recognize that righteousness, what is right in God’s eyes, has nothing in common with lawlessness. (Jdgs. 21:25, 2 Cor. 6:14) We will come to see God in His holy and infallible wisdom and come to know that the excuse that “no church is perfect” is a subtle subterfuge to divert spiritual discernment away from recognizing that an infallible God could not possibly design a flawed and fallible system that falls so miserably short as to produce a five to ten percent “success” rate. We will come to recognize that the “church” is patterned after the world (particularly the Roman empire’s basilica – judgment hall – and its tiers of authoritative hierarchy that makes Christ’s

command, “It shall not be so among you,” of no effect – Mk. 10:43, 7:9) and as such it is the portion of “the field” (the world – Mt. 13:38) in which the tares can intermingle with the wheat. We will come to see that the “church” is a craftily conceived deception designated by Satan and his fallen demonic cohorts to prevent the wheat from maturing and even to transform them, if possible, into tares, thus diverting them from the path that leads to life. (Mt. 7:14)

So what does one do if one finds themselves part of a counterfeit “church”? Should one just rush out the door and shake the dust off one’s feet? Should one, whether publicly or privately, confront the “pastor” and congregation members with the truth and, when they refuse to receive the truth (as they almost certainly will do), pronounce curses and label them (with vehement “righteous” anger and indignation, of course) as “deceived” and “demonized”? Perhaps the truth needs to be said but one should use as much grace and love as one can muster (commodities one who has been “discipled” by the “church” does not have in great supply) and one should be careful to be led by the Spirit of peace at all stages of any conflict that arises (a skill not taught at most “churches.”) Thus most conflicts that arise when one leaves the “church” do not bear much good fruit – but even this tendency does not mean one should, of necessity, leave silently and without explanation. There are no rules about how to exit the “church” – there is a Head, Christ Jesus, who alone can tell each one how to make one’s escape and only He knows whether any particular assembly is beyond the realm of reform.

But it must be said too that there is a standing command to “Come out” from among the “Christian” idolaters who practice lawlessness (what is right in their own eyes. – 2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:10-11) We must also come out from proximity to the trappings, influences, power and deceptions of Mystery Babylon (the evil influence and spirit behind much of the counterfeit “church”) so that we don’t share in the punishment she so rightly deserves. (Rev. 18:4) Again, only the Head, Christ Jesus, can and must help each individual know whether the “church” or assembly or “ministry” one participates in is peopled with genuinely re-born citizens of heaven (however much or little deception still needs to be jettisoned) or merely an unrepentant mixed multitude that has no intention of purifying themselves as *all* believers are commanded and expected to do. (1 Jn. 3:3, 2 Cor. 7:1) But if one is entirely unwilling to leave the “church” at Christ’s leading or if one refuses to see what even counting heads will show as to the true nature of “church,” one can know with certainty that his loyalty to his “church” is greater than his loyalty to Christ, a condition that can have devastating consequences now and in eternity. Jesus’ question, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Lk. 6:46) and His warning that “Not everyone who *says* to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of God, but he who *does* the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21) are truths that weigh heavily against any continued involvement with and participation in “church” at the expense of His kingdom and His ekklesia.

Let he who has ears hear.

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