

But the Building Is Just a Tool

Neil Girrard

A friend once tried to convince me that I would approve of his pastor and his “church” because the pastor taught, “The church building is only a tool. *Relationships* between one another is most important.” My friend then proceeded to list the things this fellowship was doing to promote relationships. And quite an impressive list it was. But no matter how impressive the list, it is still a list of activities that are designed to attempt to overcome the inertia, the handicap, the burden the building represents to true spiritual growth. In the face of this “relationship building,” the building remains a tool alright - a tool to prevent the body of Christ from reaching full maturity.

James wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (Jas. 1:27) The “church” building saps our resources - both in time and money – inhibiting and preventing us from meeting the needs of the orphans and widows in our own neighborhoods. As such it is only a hindrance to pure and undefiled religion before God.

Any building which regularly puts its people in rows all facing towards one man or a few leaders who are elevated over the crowd commits two crimes against the assembly:

- 1) The doctrines and practices of Nicolaitanism (see Rev. 2:6, 15) are promoted, and
- 2) the practices which would promote the greatest spiritual growth (see 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 4:11) are neglected.

The argument is made that if there were no building, people searching for God would not know where to look to find His people. This is contrary to what Jesus said, “*Everyone* who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” (Jn. 6:45) It also demonstrates that today’s “church” is lacking the primary characteristic of a genuine relationship with Christ - the self-sacrificing love for one another - which draws others into the loving arms of the Savior. When we need a physical gimmick - whether that be a building, a style of singing, a method of presentation, or whatever - we have lost contact with the very heart of the gospel.

People do not know where to look to find a real relationship with Christ for a number of reasons:

- 1) They don’t want one. Jesus said, “The light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (Jn. 3:19-20) John also wrote, “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.” (Jn. 1:11) Though many desire to appear religious, we must always remember that relatively few indeed truly seek to worship God in spirit and in truth and to walk in His light. We must not make the fakes so comfortable that the true seekers remain unfed and uncared for.

- 2) The vast majority of those who “go to church” do not have a real relationship with Jesus either. They are quite content with religious principles and social connections. Thus those who are seeking a genuine working solution

to their guilt and dysfunctions are seeing the impotency and ineffectiveness of the “church” and too many assume that God, not the imposter “church,” is the fraud.

3) Those who do have a genuine relationship with God but who attend a “church” to be lectured to by a “pastor” are locked in spiritual infancy, feeding on milk and not meat and their care and nurturing is inhibited by the very ones who claim to be able to give them life. (see Heb. 5:12-13) Paul told us that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds **and** teachers for the express purpose of equipping and building up the body so that *all* could be brought to spiritual maturity. (Eph. 4:11-16) Continued “ministry” by a “pastor” who brings only prepared sermons to the table may keep some people alive (it may not!), but at best it keeps them in a state of spiritual starvation and malnutrition. The younger, untaught members of the flock must be taught the basic things of the Bible, true - but they also need the prophetic living word which flows from the heart of God - both to hear it and to speak it. They need to have living interaction with the godliness and experience of true elders and they need to experience, firsthand for themselves, the giftings of the other spiritual leaders in real-life situations where the Person and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is manifested to the glory of God.

There is yet another aspect of this issue which needs examined. Peter wrote that by God’s “exceedingly great and precious promises” we can know Christ because “His divine power has given to us *all* things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3-4 - emphasis added) And what is the **only** source where we can find this knowledge and these promises in their purest form? The Bible. Early in the New Testament, Christ promises that He would build His ekklesia. (Mt. 16:18) From this promise to the end of the Book, the pages of the Bible know **absolutely nothing** of a “church building.” It knows of home fellowships or assemblies and it knows of spiritual messages given by apostles and evangelists (most often in dialogue, not monologue, format), but it knows nothing of utilizing the resources of the flock to construct a meeting hall patterned after the Roman legal building wherein a “pastor” can deliver a weekly sermon. It knows nothing of draining the resources of the sheep to maintain this building and the affluent lifestyle of the professional staff. **Not one word!!!**

If God’s promises - by which we know and experience Christ and His power - contained even one word about a “church” building, there might be some basis for approving of using the building as a tool. But since it is not there and because it competes against true spiritual growth, we would be wise to follow Christ’s command to cut off those things which cause us to sin against God. (Mt. 18:8)

Those who insist upon having a building, and who persist in claiming that is a tool to be used by God, also ignore church history. In the first two centuries, the people of Christ overturned the world - and it did not have one “church” building! In the subsequent seventeen centuries, the people of Christ has been riddled with compromise and weakness and has often left only a negative impact on the world - and it has had thousands of “church” buildings. When will we recognize that only “a little leaven leavens the whole lump”? (1 Cor. 5:6)

There are those that think it only a small sin to meet in “church” buildings. While it is indeed a subtle sin, it is by no means small. Those that think this way do not see the threat that the establishment style “church” is to their spiritual development in Christ. They are much like the mouse appreciating the design of the mousetrap and the way it holds the cheese in just the right light. The “church” is a trap from the ground up. Even the architecture itself is designed to

propose to you that God is only a distant God who dwells in unapproachable heights and untoouchable light. The sermon is designed to cause you to believe that only golden-tongued orators trained at some professional religious school can actually hear God and adequately present the word of God to others. The platform and pulpit are there to remind you that the man speaking has greater authority and wisdom than you do. The pews are to remind you that you must remain somber, silent and passive, well-kept in “your place” and that it is inappropriate for you to obey the commands Christ and His apostles gave us to love and serve one another (that’s for “somewhere else” or “someone else,” especially the “professionals”). The doors and walls are there to remind you that, although we say all Christians are our brothers, those who don’t meet with us are an inferior breed who must be kept out. And the baskets that are passed around or the boxes that are set out to catch your money as you drop it in are designed to remind you that you must pay to eat of the fruit of the teacher’s labors.

All of this is foreign to the New Testament or stolen and carried forward from the obsolete Old Testament. (see Heb. 8:13) God gave apostles (the genuinely called and gifted ones, that is) so that the individual believer would understand that he or she is a vital representative of the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gave prophets (the genuinely called and gifted ones, that is) so that the individual believer would learn to be able to hear God for him/herself. God gave evangelists (the genuinely called and gifted ones, that is) so that the believer would be able to have God’s concern for the lost. He gave shepherds (the genuinely called and gifted ones, that is) so that the believer would come to have God’s concern for the saved. And He gave teachers (the genuinely called and gifted ones, that is) so that the believer would learn to be able to properly present the truth to every man who might ask. When viewed in this context, it is easy to see that the “church” meeting has very little to do with true Christian living.

Thus those that equate “assembling together” (Heb. 10:25) with attending a “church” meeting are sadly misinformed. To be assembled together means much more than going to a “church” meeting. It refers to the *fact* that we have been placed into the body of Christ according to the will of God - who places each one where *He* wills. “Assembling together” refers to our being obedient to remain in interaction with those whom He has placed in our lives and in our own neighborhoods. Though our modern technology allows us to drive right past our neighbors without ever once knowing their names, God still considers taking care of your neighbor, especially those of the household of God, to be of extreme importance. (see Mt. 22:39; Gal. 6:10) When we exclude our hurting neighbors from our fellowship because they are of a different denomination from us or because they hold to different doctrines, we are no different than the priest and the Levite who passed by the helpless victim on the road to Damascus, maintaining a “respectable” distance from this undesirable element. (see Lk. 10:29-37)

Though I hope to remain friends with the one I mentioned at the beginning, I can neither approve of his “pastor” nor of his “church.” This is not because I have been set up in some position to pass judgment, but because the word of God is clearly set against these practices. I am merely adding my voice of agreement with what God has already said. All those who truly seek God would be wise to do the same.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard/Paidion Books
P.O. Box 327
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – www.paidionbooks.org
Email – paidion@paidionbooks.org
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