

Leadership and Unity

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On the basis of some observations made by George Barna (in his recent book *Revolution*), some “veterans” of this out-of-“church” revolution are now willing to label all the problems of the “church” as merely “a leadership crisis.” If this shortsightedness were not a lethally dangerous deceptive ploy of the demonic, the whole notion would be ludicrous. But because this detour into yet another “church” error will cause a number of people who have gotten some measure of liberty from the “church” to be drawn into another man-made, demonically-inspired counterfeit and because the people being drawn into this “leadership movement” are in earnest makes this whole affair a grievous burden to address.

Paul wrote, “In the first place, I hear that when you come together as an ekklesia, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval.” (1 Cor. 11:18-19)

We must remember what was occurring in Corinth at that time. Paul had already written, “...it has been declared to me concerning you...that there are contentions among you. ...you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?” (1 Cor. 1:11, 3:3-4)

Why were there divisions and factions in Corinth? Because there were approved and recognized *leaders* who differed with other approved, recognized *leaders*. Without the followers behind each of the leaders, there would be nothing to contend for. Unlike Jude, who exhorted his readers to contend earnestly for the purity of the faith against those who would pervert, subvert and pollute it (see Jude 3), these approved, recognized leaders were contending for more followers by putting forth their version(s) of “the truth.”

Jesus said of the Pharisees that they were “blind leaders of the blind.” (Mt. 15:14) Why were their followers blind? Because they enjoyed the responsibility-free, relative obscurity of being “number two men.” Without the number two men, the “number one man/men” are just isolated voices, easily dismissed (by worldly “wisdom”) as cranks and crack pots. (A lone voice in the wilderness simply could not be the voice of God.) And without the number one man/men, the number two men would have to think for themselves and act upon their convictions alone before God – a proposition most number two men find too daunting to attempt.

The sick, worldly symbiotic relationship between number one men and number two men is a key, integral part of the “church,” the counterfeit scheme of the devil to divert the people of Christ from their responsibilities to Christ’s kingdom of light. It was strictly countermanded by Christ (Mt. 23:8-10, 20:25-26, Mk. 10:42-43, Lk. 22:25-26) and echoed by His apostles. (1 Cor. 3:4, 1 Pet. 5:3) But church history is largely just the story of number one men trying to bring number two men to their ideas of following the Lord. Both leaders and followers have always fallen into the ditch of error, compromise and division until today we have hundreds if not thousands of divisions (denominations) each claiming to be *the* way to follow Christ.

We need to hear again Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians:

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that there be **no** divisions among you*, but that you be *perfectly* joined together *in the same mind and in the same judgment.*”

(1 Cor. 1:10 - emphasis added)

How are we to do this? By submitting to the Head Christ Jesus. (1 Cor. 11:3) By living according to the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and not according to the carnal mind. (Rom. 8:6) Only when we *all* do this will we, the people of Christ, stop being torn apart by the contentions of men jockeying for position and power. We will simply recognize their sin, folly and enmity against God and avoid them. (Rom. 16:17) If these “leaders” would be content to simply seek their every approval from God (see 2 Tim. 2:15, Eph. 1:6) instead of the approval of more followers and sycophants (yes-men), the landscape of Christianity would be vastly different than it is now.

Genuine leaders in Christ are those who – throughout their whole Christian life – have held fast the word of God. (Tit. 1:9) The word of God is *not* the traditions of men that war against the word of God. (Mt. 15:6) “Leaders” who have latched onto traditions of men – or who advocate that we re-join ourselves to those who still practice these idolatries but may be more proficient at some more visible acts of charities or some other aspect of life in Christ – wrongly believing those traditions to be the ways of God, are simply and completely disqualified as leaders in the genuine body of Christ – no matter how many followers they have or what titles and giftings/callings they claim to have.

Genuine leaders *must* have a spiritual lifestyle that is especially evident in a conflict. Paul wrote, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in *humility* correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:24-26 - emphasis added)

The man who uses worldly methods (avoidance, slander, “damage control” – talking to everyone except the one with whom there is a conflict) to protect his position or power base is not practicing obedience to Christ – and he is not a genuine spiritual leader. The “leader” who stands in an exalted place of pretended or assumed superiority has taken on roles that are designed by the devil to ensnare him and get that man to accomplish the devil’s purpose of scattering the sheep away from the true Shepherd. Make no mistake – the sheep who have glommed onto some man are already wandered away from the true Shepherd and vulnerable to attack by the enemy who ravenously seeks whom he may devour. (1 Pet. 5:8)

Many among these revolution “veterans” are well aware that there is a war coming between those who claim to be followers of Christ. Jesus Himself predicted it. (Mt. 24:10) But these also have the predisposition that says, “Of course, *I* am on the right side!” But these do not exhibit the humility and peace and other characteristics of the Spirit of Christ. We need to hear again what Paul said, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.” (Rom. 8:9) Those who come in a different spirit than the Spirit of Christ are not only dangerous to our own spiritual lives (see 2 Cor. 11:3-4), they are not our brothers!

God has taken many people out of the “church,” leading them into a time of isolation and purification (many call this “the wilderness”). But rather than submitting to the mind of Christ to learn just how deep the purification process needs to go, many have simply made the isolated wilderness their permanent home. Or they have left the wilderness prematurely or improperly (again failing to learn just how deep the purification process needs to go) and have joined themselves to movements of men thinking they were finding the real body of Christ. These have found themselves frustrated, stymied in their relationship with God and have had to withdraw

themselves from these movements of men (which they should never have joined themselves to in the first place but rather should have endured the wilderness and submitted to the mind of Christ). But now these misguided souls, because of *their* discontent with the results of those former movements, are now looking to *human* leaders to bring about the results only abiding in Christ can bring. In three to five years, these same people are very likely to be bailing out of their own “leadership movement” – unless of course they grow content and complacent, securely locked into their position of power and authority over however many “believers” are naïve enough to get underneath them.

Jesus said, “But do not be *called* Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not *call* anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, he who is in heaven. And do not be *called* leaders (teachers); for One is your Leader, that is, Christ.” (Mt. 23:8-10 - emphasis added)

Not only has this new “leadership” movement completely missed the clear command in this passage – to not be *called* teachers, leaders and fathers – but they have failed to grasp the significance of what their disobedience to this command will do. When a man has a title, it is automatically assumed, on both the part of the man and those who follow him, that he has authority. Once you have the title, you don’t necessarily have to have Christ to exercise “leadership” and that leadership will most certainly be in the wrong direction. And once the followers know who the men with the leadership titles and/or positions are, they don’t need any spiritual discernment to see who actually is or is not ahead of them on the path that leads to life. “The man has a title or a position, he must be more godly or spiritual than I am!” What a lie! Once we see the title, we stop looking for the real spiritual leaders who *are* mature in the spirit of Christ – and we settle for a paltry, man-made substitute in those times when our spiritual life in Christ might actually benefit from interaction with someone who is truly more mature than we are.

Genuine leaders are grown over time, not instantly manufactured on an assembly line. It is the *process* of holding fast to the word of God (which is the Person of Christ) which makes a genuine leader. Those who short-circuit or short-change this process are not mature enough to be genuine leaders. The men who flunk the tests of the wilderness (as many of these revolution “veterans” appear to have done) are always going to be seriously delinquent in true spiritual leadership qualities. The man who has followed the Lord for 20 years, coming out of the “church,” going through the various leftover “church” deceptions without joining himself to them but rather stepping away from all forms of “Christian” idolatry, is in a better stead to preach the original gospel than is the man who, in the same 20 years, failed to recognize and leave behind *all* the deceptions of “church” and “ministry” (notions that add something to the Scriptures so as to somehow “better” serve or instruct people) and who has not passed the wilderness tests and who looks to the authority of men to accomplish the work of God.

But it is not a question of “Do I follow this man or that man?” It is a question of “Which of these men – if either – are saying what Christ and God are really saying now?” Once that question is resolved, the question becomes, “How do I, as an individual created by God to be a unique part of a greater whole, both do and be what I have been made to be?”

Paul wrote, “Pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22) The focus for the individual person is always on that individual’s obedience to the work of God in their life. The test of whether that individual’s obedience is appropriate is how that person’s actions mesh with the actions of those others who *call on the*

Lord out of a pure heart. Our actions, if our hearts are pure, will never mesh well with those whose hearts are not pure before God – nor is this compromised mixture the standard whereby we recognize the corporate nature of the body of Christ. Though it *is* what we have grown accustomed to at “church,” we must outgrow this foolishness and finally come to recognize that a false unity is just as good as a false division for the purposes of the enemy of our souls! We are never to cater to the standard of the mixed multitude but rather we must exhort and stir up one another to *ever greater* love and good works.

And this love and good works must be brought down to the level of where we live. It is not appropriate for every believer to wait until they make a short-term “missions” trip to India, China, Africa or Russia to expend their resources and energies on foreign brothers and sisters while we neglect the ones “next door.” Nor is it appropriate to attend a commuter “church” where neither the “pastor” nor the people live in that area. To attend such an abomination is to drive right past our neighbors – the orphans, widows and least of Christ’s brothers whom God has placed in our lives – and to insist that God bless us in our disobedience!

When we study the New Testament Scriptures, we find that the only acceptable division line among the people of Christ was the boundary of the city in which they lived. There was the ekklesia of Antioch, the ekklesia of Ephesus, the ekklesia of Laodicea, etc. “Ekklesia” is always *singular* before a city. “Ekklesia” is plural *only* when it refers to regions (like Judea, Macedonia, Asia, etc.) In God’s plan, *I* belong first and only to the ekklesia of “my town.” I can visit and, as the Lord leads or allows, I can even work with any other ekklesia, but if I don’t know where my “roots” are attached to the body of Christ, I cannot participate in the work of Christ but can only do what is right in my own eyes (lawlessness) and I certainly cannot help establish anyone else in their proper “roots” in Christ. That nearly everyone, assisted in large part by advances in commuter technology and material affluence, has abandoned the idea of the local ekklesia does not negate this truth and godly requirement – rather it only confirms that nearly everyone is practicing lawlessness. (see Mt. 7:23, 24:12)

When it comes to my neighbor who claims to follow Christ, if he has a different spirit, a different Jesus or a different gospel (see 2 Cor. 11:3-4), on what basis might I have koinonia fellowship or the genuine unity of the Spirit with him? If he has only a form of godliness but not the true life-changing power of life by the Spirit of Christ, I must withdraw from him! (2 Tim. 3:5) I cannot expect him to obey Christ (at any level) and, at most, I can receive him only as a neighbor and not as a functional brother in Christ.

But if I find any believer in “my town,” and especially one in my own neighborhood, who truly has the Spirit of Christ and who is intent on abiding in Him, this one (or however many there may be) is the ekklesia to which I belong – and he/they belong to me (assuming I am in right standing with God). And it does not get any more complicated than that!

Men have grotesquely distorted the body of Christ for centuries by disregarding this simple truth, attaching themselves to men of like mind and to movements and denominations (divisions, dissensions, heresies) that give lip service to Christ but in reality serve only the interests and “careers” of the “leaders.” The whole system is flawed and corrupt, completely incompatible with the life of Christ, both individually and corporately.

We must leave the “church,” the counterfeit imitation of the ekklesia. We must endure and pass the tests of the wilderness before we are free to leave the wilderness – and we must return to the wilderness whenever the Shepherd so leads. We must individually press on to spiritual maturity (see 2 Pet. 1:5-11) with or without leaders as we are in the day of lawlessness

where only those who endure will be saved. (Mt. 24:13) If God places a leader in our life, someone who clearly and personally demonstrates a greater spiritual maturity or a clearer knowledge of at least some portion of the path that leads to eternal life (something God does primarily in our immaturity or when we are at a particularly dangerous place in the path), then we will not find it burdensome to obey God and walk behind this leader for whatever time and season the Lord so directs.

John wrote, “God’s commands are not burdensome.” (1 Jn. 5:3) That the leadership of so many men becomes burdensome and oppressive is *the sign* by which we may know that the man’s leadership is not grounded in Christ but in some other source of authority and power.

Let us return to where we started. Paul wrote, “When you come together as ekklesia, [there are divisions and factions] among you...there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. *Therefore* when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.” (1 Cor. 11:18-20)

The outward form is the same. They gather in the name of Christ but in reality they have no unity of the Spirit of Christ and they do not worship the Father in spirit and truth. The spiritual reality is that they are *not* partaking of the Lord’s table. At best, they are partaking of the table of men – at worst, they are partaking of the table of the demonic. But either way, they are being robbed of their precious heritage in Christ.

Wherever there are divisions and factions, envy and strife, there simply is carnality – non-spiritual immaturity, ignorance, blindness, dullness and outright enmity against God. Don’t be fooled by high-sounding talk about better leaders being the solution to the problems of “church.” The problems go far deeper than this.

Let he who has ears hear.

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