Subject: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by william on Tue, 30 Mar 2010 05:55:39 GMT
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Whatever one may believe about Clement of Rome (one of the first of the apostolic fathers) we can easily discern from his epistle to the Corinthian church the extent they had fallen away from the truths that were proclaimed by Paul by the end of the first century.

His chief indictment concerned the division that was in their midst. Paul had warned them about the very same issue.

I believe that we can make some comparisons between the church at Corinth and our own situation.

I. They differ from most of us in that they actually had an assembly to identify with, however imperfect it may have been.
i. Those of us who find ourselves alone in the wilderness must in some way justify our condition by believing that we are somehow yoked to the 'church universal' even though we might not like the terminology. A question we must ask--is it better to be a part of an imperfect representation of a local church, (like the Corinthian church) or is it better to separate completely from such assemblies?
1) To answer such a question we first must decide what actually constitutes a church?
a) Are there any believers present?
b) Is heresy being taught by the leadership?
c) Is there any hope that God may salvage such a church?
d) Do we possess any gift that might help to bring about the restoration of the body of Christ in this church?
2) At what point can it be said that a church has become apostate, or has had its lamp stand removed?
3) Can one become a Christian in this church?
a) What is necessary for one to become a Christian?
b) If there is a possibility that one can become a Christian in this church, what course of action would you advise for the new convert?
i) Stay put and read your bible.
ii) Find another church. (Assuming this is possible)
iii) Leave and join the ranks of the independent Christians everywhere who are a part of the mystical 'church universal'?
4) What doctrines are absolutely necessary for a church to be considered a Christian church?
a) We can assume, according to Jesus, that the church should be promoting a love for God among its members.
b) Secondly, there should be love toward others, both within the fellowship and without. (Who is my neighbor?)

c) Interpretation of biblical truth should be based upon sound principles of hermeneutics.
d) It is desirable that all believe the same things when it comes to doctrine, but is there room for differences in interpretation when it comes to things like the head-covering, for instance, or the holidays, or how one may or may not exercise their faith regarding healing, deliverance, or the prosperity of the believer? Could there be fellowship among those who are at different levels regarding these things? Do these things determine whether or not a church is true or false?
e) Positive confession. Is this a deal-breaker when it comes to the definition of a church?
ii. Is it possible to be a part of the body of Christ, without being a part of an assembly?
iii. Are the gifts (1Cor12, Rom12, Eph4) only given to those who are a part of an assembly, or can we expect them to operate through us more or less independently of the fellowship of believers?
II. The Corinthians, however imperfect they were, had an abundance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
III. The Corinthians, despite an abundance of problems, despite their divisions, despite their schisms, were still unified enough to be considered a church.
IV. The Corinthians were still a functioning assembly toward the end of the first century even though they had not followed the words of Paul (which we know to be THE WORD OF GOD) and were still plagued with the same sort of vices that are enumerated in 1 & 2 Corinthians. I'm not advocating for a carnal church, nor am I saying that they were not in danger of losing their lamp stand, but it is an interesting fact that even with all of their problems-- lack of unity, lack of agreement on doctrine, jealousy, envy, strife, pride, etc.--they were still viable as a church!

I'm not sure where I'm going with this other than to provide some food for thought.

I'm certainly not trying to point a finger (I don't have) at anyone for being in a situation that none of us really want to be in, but I don't like the status-quo and I'm not going to be satisfied as an unattached fingernail. I was made to scratch an itch and I'm having a tough time doing it without a finger!

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Tue, 30 Mar 2010 11:08:09 GMT
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What to do? The qestions continue, I've sure wrestled with these thoughts over and over. And though I've never felt comfortable with the position of NOT being part of a visible local assembly, but every time I'd gotten involved I've found myself miserable and compromising in order to 'fit in' and have left in worse spiritual condition than I came in.(which is my own fault, not blaming anyone else.)

I don't want to write something that sounds like self justification, so I won't say anything else except, thanks William for sharing. Your post does cause a person who is sincere to examine themselves and think. And the point about being an unattached fingernail that can't scratch without a finger is good. Maybe before seeking a burden for the 'body of Christ' at large, I should fast and pray for the member of it that I see in the mirror...

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Wed, 31 Mar 2010 14:45:22 GMT
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Speaking of food for thought... if 'food for thought' contained calories, I'd weight 400 lbs.

cause I'm always chewing on something...

But seriously William, how can one ever be part of an assembly when they aren't in agreement with most of what is practiced or not practiced in relationship to obeying what the Word of God has revealed? And I'll accept that some things can be caulked up to youth or lack of teaching, and that love covers a multitude of sins. But it's been my experience that it's just a matter of time before it becomes too serious to ignore. It's one thing for the sheep to be young in The Lord and not 'know', but willing to be taught and hungry for the truth; but when the pastor/5-fold/elder/leadership isn't teaching the truth and is unwilling to follow Biblical standards, but rather follows after traditions of man, how can a true disciple of Jesus remain in such an assembly?

I see no way be be there (and be an active, participating member) without compromising that which The Lord has shown us. Did He present us with these truths 30 years ago only to have us set them aside today in order to be part of a 'church'? OK, let's say we're not really setting them aside, just not doing them for the sake of 'unity' or not causing another to stumble, (some may call it not being so dogmatic and showing love)

Do we,(if sisters) stop wearing a head-covering? Do we start celebrating the pagan 'holy days'? What do we do concerning divine healing? Share our faith and experienced testimonies of God's faithfulness? OR, wear the head-covering, dance before The Lord, give testimonies of healing, share the truth about their 'sacred holidays'. How about what to do when everyone is honoring the American flag, pledging allegiance, getting involved in political and social change, how about the church blood drive, and on and on...How does a person, who's eyes have been opened by God's grace, return to that which they've confessed to be delivered from and expect Gods blessing to remain in their lives as though it doesn't really matter to HIM?

Not preaching nor saying you've done this...or that I have all the answers, at all. Just asking questions...

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by william on Wed, 31 Mar 2010 15:20:38 GMT
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I know, I know... all we can do is ask the questions.

I really don't have the answers to a lot of them but here are a few things that I believe is right for *my* household. (Every man did that which was right in their own eyes...)

Brother Freeman taught us how to be mature disciples, not children who need to be told 'do this and don't do that'. So a broad statement like 'compromising what we were taught' takes on a completely different meaning depending on who is listening.

I think 'we were taught' to have faith in God and trust absolutely in His Word. Others take the statement 'what we were taught' to mean 'what Brother Freeman said'. I do not fall into the latter group.

Quote:James: But seriously William, how can one ever be part of an assembly when they aren't in agreement with most of what is practiced or not practiced in relationship to obeying what the Word of God has revealed?

Just for the record--I am not currently 'a part' of any assembly; i.e. I'm not a former-smoker now turned anti-smoking-nazi, here.

That said, I have no problem going into what could turn into a Kill-Will rally at the local synagogue or denomination church. Contrary to popular belief-- there are Christians in those places!

I'd love to continue, but duty calleth... more later!

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Thu, 01 Apr 2010 13:25:18 GMT
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moulder wrote on Wed, 31 March 2010 09:20

Just for the record--I am not currently 'a part' of any assembly; i.e. I'm
not a former-smoker now turned anti-smoking-nazi, here.

I'd love to continue, but duty calleth... more later!

Blessings,
William

Sorry to hear you're not part of an assembly (I was of the understanding that you and Abiding were among the few who had found an assembly that resembled a NT church...you had mentioned preparing Sunday School teachings...)

Well, ya'll can come down this weekend to B'ham and hide and hunt colored eggs with me, then afterwards we can go hunting for the rabbit...(be sure to dress up in your Easter finest).

"Anti-smoking-nazi"...I love your use the English language.

..."because I'm a man who was once lost in sin, I can't very well judge others"... But I am 'anti-sin'.

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by william on Thu, 01 Apr 2010 23:30:53 GMT
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On Thu, 1 Apr 2010, James wrote:

>
> Sorry to hear you're not part of an assembly (I was of the understanding
> that you and Abiding were among the few who had found an assembly that
> resembled a NT church...you had mentioned preparing Sunday School

> teachings...)
>

Well it wasn't exactly a close resemblance...<grin> but I still teach two classes, one on Sunday AM and the other on Wednesday night at another church. I've been teaching there for about three years. It started off just on Wednesday nights and then the pastor asked me to do a men's Sunday school class (theology). After a few months he reorganized some things and decided that he would do the Wed. service but that didn't last too long. More reorganization and he added back the Wed. service and changed the Sunday class to all adults instead of just men.

We've gone through Galatians, Daniel, Revelation, Luke (that took over a year!), and now Acts. They all know that I'm a tongue speaker so it was interesting when we got to Acts two! Currently we are in Acts five.

I've grown very fond of all of the members. I'm actually the youngest one!

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Fri, 02 Apr 2010 01:56:44 GMT
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Several of the guys who did the Exploring Christianity study with me last summer and fall want to do a Bible study apart from the influence of a structured denominational viewpoint. One has suggested the book of Job, another wants to study Revelation, and one wants to start in Genesis.(I'd love to do a study on theology, ethics, or maybe a study of what faith is and how it effects our day to day walk with God) I hope we can come to an agreement and get started in a couple of weeks when tax season is over. I've never done this with such a diversified group, there's a Baptist, a Presbyterian, an uncommitted, and a non-denominational.

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...

Posted by william on Fri, 02 Apr 2010 02:24:07 GMT
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Yes, that could be interesting what with the various backgrounds and all.

You can actually get into a lot of theology and ethics no matter which book you choose; I'm sure you'll have a blast!

You could listen to S. Lewis Johnson's audio mp3s to bone up for the Presbyterian. He's got over a thousand messages that are archived at:

http://www.sljinstitute.net/

He covers a lot of the books of the bible and has a complete systematic theology you can download. Obviously he isn't charismatic but he is from Alabama which makes listening to him a pure pleasure! An added benefit--he's an OT scholar with a great grasp of the Hebrew language.

I have found that most Baptists I meet are pretty easy to converse with especially if you back up what you are saying with the bible. Just a little bit of reading from Strong's Systematic Theology will convince you that they are pretty solid doctrinally. (I know that not all Baptist's hail from the same camp, but the ones I know are a blessing to talk to!)

The non-denom might be a charismatic... at least I don't hear that term outside of charismatic circles.

You can treat the non-committed guy like Paul treated the Athenians at Mars' Hill--Preach Jesus!

I'm just having fun here... I know that the Lord will lead you in all things.

Did you mention something in another note about inviting us down for deviled eggs on Sunday? <grin>

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by william on Fri, 02 Apr 2010 05:16:26 GMT
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On Wed, 31 Mar 2010, James wrote:

>
> I see no way be be there (and be an active, participating member)
> without compromising that which The Lord has shown us. Did He present us
> with these truths 30 years ago only to have us set them aside today in
> order to be part of a 'church'? OK, let's say we're not really setting
> them aside, just not doing them for the sake of 'unity' or not causing
> another to stumble, (some may call it not being so dogmatic and showing
> love)
>

I hear what you are saying, but you can turn it around and ask the same question this way: Did He present us with these truths 30 years ago so that we could avoid fellowshipping with anyone who wasn't a beneficiary of those teachings?

Here are the possibilities as I see them:

1) It's been 30 years and we have 10 more years in the wilderness before we graduate. Waiting for the burning bush experience may actually be what we are called to do.

2) Stop messing around and find somewhere on earth we can relocate to so that we can continue to be taught wonderful truths so that one of these days we can stand before Him and give an account concerning what we have been taught.

3) If He tarries, we can continue to wait until we die and at that point we can thank Him personally for the wonderful teaching He gave to us.

Those are valid options even though I inserted a couple of scary ideas to show that there will be consequences if we are wrong.

4) We can follow the example of the early church when they were forced to flee the comfortable setting of their near-perfect church and go out and preach the word everywhere, even though they were only recent converts to

the new teaching.

Excuses:

--A) We aren't called to 'teach' or 'preach'. After all, the wonderful teaching that we received was so that we could grow fat and learn how the faith message can benefit our own lives.

--B) The wonderful teaching concerning body ministry was only applicable thirty years ago when we had a body where we could minister (assuming we actually ministered; without a 'call', we might not have even ministered back then, especially if we weren't called to 'teach' or 'preach' or 'exhort'.).

--C) Only a few of those that were called to hear that word were actually chosen to minister that word we heard. Even fewer than we thought since almost all who heard that word ARE NOT MINISTERING, not even those who DID MINISTER the word during that period.

Is there really a purpose for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit beyond the personal benefits we derive?

What makes us different than any pew sitter, sitting in thousands of churches across the land, when it comes to spreading the word we received?

Is that what we really want? Just another church where we can sit back and hear wonderful truths while someone who is called (or says they are) does the preaching?

To quote a wonderful teacher, "God has called me to minister to ministers". If we are going to quote brother Freeman and follow his sayings let's not forget that this also was something he firmly believed. Do we believe it?

I have struggled with these same issues. No one here should get the impression that just because I have been blessed with an opportunity to minister His word, that I'm somehow different than any of you, or consider myself one of those 'ministers' that has been called into the "five-fold". If you could sit eyeball to eyeball with me you would quickly realize that I can barely speak a paragraph without butchering the king's english. I am one of the foolish, weak, base, and despised, that Paul mentioned... yet through Jesus I can do all things. God's word says that not many

noble are called (you know, those who are eloquent speakers); no, He has called us all to take what we were given and give it out again.

There aren't too many times, driving to the meeting, that I don't think about Moses begging off because of his lack of speaking ability and remind God that He is the one who made my mouth and I pray that He will somehow anoint what proceeds from my mouth and make it intelligible to those who hear. So please don't get the impression that I'm a natural when it comes to teaching His Word. I'm saying that in the natural any one of you would be a better choice to bring forth what we were given.

I do it because I believe that is what we were called to do.

>
> Do we,(if sisters) stop wearing a head-covering? Do we start celebrating
> the pagan 'holy days'? What do we do concerning divine healing? Share
> our faith and experienced testimonies of God's faithfulness? OR, wear
> the head-covering, dance before The Lord, give testimonies of healing,
> share the truth about their 'sacred holidays'. How about what to do when
> everyone is honoring the American flag, pledging allegiance, getting
> involved in political and social change, how about the church blood
> drive, and on and on...How does a person, who's eyes have been opened by
> God's grace, return to that which they've confessed to be delivered from
> and expect Gods blessing to remain in their lives as though it doesn't
> really matter to HIM?
>

If it is true--that it does matter to God-- then how is it that we don't see ourselves as preachers of righteousness to those who haven't heard what you have heard? (How will they hear, without a preacher?)

To paraphrase another minister: How can we say we love someone and not give them the things they need? (Faith without works--is dead.)

And finally, to answer your last question I'll need to ask another--How does a person, whose eyes have been opened, ask God to pour out more of His power when we aren't willing to give away what we already have been given?

As I go though the book of Acts I'm seeing that, while it is extremely important for the bride to make herself ready, the focus is not on the bride (ourselves) but the focus is on spreading the message to as many

people as possible. They were on a mission, they were missionaries, intent on spreading the Gospel far and wide. We are scattered, just like them, the difference? We wait.

They went everywhere spreading the word while the 'ministers' stayed in Jerusalem.

Going into the world to preach about the head-covering and preach about the holidays will be about as effective as those who went about preaching circumcision to those gentiles who had just received the living water. On the other hand, going forth with the message that Jesus died for all of their sins and that the Holy Spirit is a Gift from the Living God that is offered to them will be effective. Once they receive that message I daresay that you won't need to preach on the holidays, the Holy Spirit is much better at setting them free than we will ever be!

So should we wait or should we go... we have examples of both but obviously I lean toward the latter!

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Fri, 06 Dec 2019 15:39:42 GMT
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Gary mentioned reading older posts the other day and this is one that caught my eye. Ten years after these comments were made by me I find myself having changed/grown in my convictions/thoughts/opinions of what a "church" is and if I can fellowship/worship/share without compromising my faith in Jesus.
I can and I do. I have been attending a SBC church (Southern Baptist) for almost seven years, I can say with conviction that there are many followers of Jesus there, one can come to salvation by the preaching of God's Word there, and worship is worship, not a rock concert with Christian lyrics. Do most celebrate Christmas? Yep, Easter too, and probably very few pray in tongues, but they have put their trust in Jesus as both Lord and Savior and live lives that reflects godliness. The pastor preaches the gospel message, communion is observed, and baptism.
Is it a perfect assembly of believers? No, because if for no other reason, I go there, and I'm not perfect. But after hunkering down making every excuse imaginable for almost 25 years, I finally realized, just as William said back then, I haven't been called to withhold fellowship, but rather

share in fellowship with fellow believers.

Thanks William, your encouragement and wisdom has been very helpful in my life and I appreciate you.

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by william on Fri, 06 Dec 2019 16:50:40 GMT
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This is so ironic.

We've switched roles! I'm much more isolated than you now, and here you are out-and-about rubbing elbows with other believers!

You're inspiring me to put my own advice back in to practice though!

Blessings,
William

Subject: Re: The Corinthians had a church...
Posted by james on Fri, 06 Dec 2019 17:11:42 GMT
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Yeah. the irony isn't lost on me...

Of course around this time of year I have things to deal with that are sometimes a bit awkward. But I know we should be engaged with fellow believers regularly, though I'll be the last person to judge another mans convictions.

But William, I think when you were sharing and teaching those folks back then God was and will use the seeds you planted to bring glory to His name.

I'll be praying for you as you seek to be where He would have you, doing what He has appointed you to do. I'm not selling the Baptist denominational institution, but the Christian people who worship Jesus assembling together where ever.
