

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.*

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

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The Divided Church

Lately, I have been contemplating a question: Why does it seem the church has lost so much ground to the world? To this, many other questions could be added, such as: Why is the world shunning the message of the church? Why are we so divided in our message? All of this makes one wonder what the message of the church is. Add to this, why are so many leaving the church in our day? By one estimate, 30 million have walked out of the (organized, institutionalized) church. This may not be a bad thing if it is driving people closer to the Lord Jesus, but it still begs the question of why. Perhaps of greater concern is why does there appear to be a trend away from (or perhaps, a trend not toward) God among the youth or what some call the iGen?

Similar questions could be asked about the United States of America. Why are we so divided as a nation? Why is there so much divisive unrest? Why has the spirit of the world so overtaken our nation that we are spiraling down into a deep hole of darkness? Why is our moral compass spinning out of control? Why are we becoming just not immoral but so amoral? In case you missed the subtlety, ***immoral*** means “contrary to the moral code of the community; unchaste; lewd; licentious; obscene”; and ***amoral*** means “not concerned with moral standards; not to be judged by criteria of morality; neither moral nor immoral.” The current *progressive* thinking is that no one is to judge any issue based on a moral code; instead, one must allow anything and everything based on feelings. Simply, moral standards are not allowed, and if one holds a position based on a moral code, then that person is rejected and labeled based on the latest progressive social justice plank. However, it doesn’t take too long before amoral issues take on a flavor of immorality. I need not give examples, for the spiritually discerning see it for themselves on nearly a daily basis now as the world plunges into further darkness. But it is getting worse than this in that ***lawlessness*** has overtaken our land, not only on the streets but also in our institutions. Obviously, more could be said along this line and there is much more going on in the US than this, but this is not the primary subject of this writing; the church is. Could it be that the nation is divided because the church is divided?

At the outset, let us be clear on one thing about the church; in the opening questions, the *church* is meant to be the outward, visible or at-large organized and institutionalized, pulpit-pew-centered entity that the world and, frankly, most Christians recognize or see as the church. Others have named it the *nominal* or *public* church, that which is a great public movement; displaying, marketing, and advertising itself just like any other manmade movement, enterprise, or business. It is a public thing that competes with all the other public things, including religions, of the world. Going forward, the word *church* will be used in this sense, that is, as the visible, public, or nominal church.

One more point; the nominal church is to be distinguished from the true church (*ekklesia*) that Christ is building that cannot lose ground to the world and that, at the appointed time, will triumph in Christ for all the world to see. One commentator calls this *the church within the church*. Others call it a *remnant church*, even a *remnant within a remnant*. Perhaps, another way to describe it is the *conquering church*. All of these designations are simply ways to distinguish the true church of God that is close to the heart of God, holding to God’s vision and His purpose, from that which is of man and not so close to His heart. Christ’s church, which is the *real* church that God sees, is spiritual in nature and, as such, is a hidden and secret work of the Spirit of God that can only be discerned and assessed spiritually. This is why the world that is flesh and even the church that is carnal cannot comprehend the true nature of the real church. All the world can do is judge the nominal church that looks and smells like so many other things of the world to the point that, on many but not all fronts, it is indistinguishable from that which is of the world, except for the fact that it displays the name of Jesus over its door. The end result is that Christ gets measured or judged by the world by what is on display in or by the church made up of what the world calls *Christians* who are seen as practicing what the world calls the *Christian religion*. This is purposely worded this way to make the

distinction between what is of the flesh (i.e., carnal) and what is of the spirit. Again, the true church is spiritual; consequently, the true Christian is spiritual as well, not in practicing a religion but in living, that is, in a way of life, especially a new creation based on Christ within the believer. ***Christ in you, the hope of glory!***

This is the challenge we face in this day. The world judges and critiques what it sees as the church (by extension, Christians) and what comes out of it (us), resulting in the truly good news of Jesus getting filtered and, in many cases, distorted and even destroyed by what comes out of this church, corporately or individually. Why is this so?

For the most part, the church has been driven by doctrines (creeds, statements of faith, themes, systematic theology, interpretative systems, denominationalism, and the like) and causes (emphases, messages, concerns, programs, strategies, ministries, and the like). Simply stated, **the church has been driven by many things**, and these very things that most all claim are biblically based, to a greater not lesser degree, have divided God's people along these lines. Our many and various doctrines, causes, even man-centered ministries have drawn numerous lines and walls between us who claim Christ. To this we must add race and culture as dividing lines as well.

Even worse, many of these things, whether doctrines or causes, have become ends unto themselves that drown out the basic message that is truly the good news, which is summed up in one word: JESUS!

Specific doctrines or causes become the centerpiece of one's message or action. Jesus' name is often attached to them, but generally in name only. But what happens is that the world judges Jesus or identifies Him with these things. Jesus gets judged by the world based on the world's assessment of the doctrine or cause just as it would judge any other cause-driven, man-centered, organization or institution. Unfortunately, it is worse than this, for the world sees the hypocrisy or inconsistency in this outward show and ultimately rejects the message of Christ.

The result is that Christ has been divided, something which Paul the apostle of the nations exhorted the Corinthian believers not to do. Clearly, history has proven we have not heeded his exhortation. On the contrary, we have excelled at division and have moved away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. Instead of our message being Jesus and our lives reflecting, expressing, and manifesting His life in love, it has become Jesus plus many things or many things with Jesus inserted in them or many things apart from Jesus altogether. The result is that Jesus does not stand out in our message or, most importantly, our lives; He is not central, supreme, and preeminent. He is within the message and our life to varying degrees, but He is not the whole of the message or our life. **Jesus is part of but not the whole of!**

To be clear, there is nothing inherently bad or wrong in holding to doctrines or, for that matter, causes. Doctrines are tenets or beliefs, and every human adheres to some form of belief or belief system, whether it is good or evil. Causes run the gamut and many of us hold to some form of cause, even if it is to simply hold up the name of Jesus. I could rightfully be accused of having a cause to refute the concept of hell and eternal torture, so I am not exempting myself from any of this. Also, without exception, we all hold to some form of interpretative bias when it comes to our understanding or interpretation of the Bible. There is no way out of this bias, for the Bible is not clear on many points. Often it gives us information without interpretation of what it means. As I have written previously, we need *rhema* from the Spirit of God for the words written on paper to become living revelation to us. This is a far different cry from being spoon-fed with digested words from the pulpit week after week.

Mind you; none of this catches God off guard, as if He is wringing His hands wondering how to fix this mess. It is fixed. The fix is already in, and it is in His Son, *Yeshua*, the Savior of the whole world and Head of His Body. The real church, the spiritual church, which is the **Body of Christ** with Christ as Head, is being built and nothing can or ever will stop this great building project (plan of God) that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the mind and heart of God, it is finished! God calls it as He sees it, and He says: "Done!"

Dear people of God, our unity is based entirely on Jesus and His Spirit that is our bond of peace. We don't attain to it; we preserve it as fact. **Jesus is the whole of our message and of our life! By His Spirit we are one Body.**

The good news is that God is about to reveal to the world the oneness of Christ's Body; all to His glory.