

The Challenge to the Church

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As we cross the frontiers into the third millennium, we find ourselves in a very different world from that of the peoples of the first millennium.

The simple world of the farmer, fisherman, carpenter and tentmaker has given way to the world of the internet, IT satellites, space probes, and genetically engineered/altered animals and food products. Computerisation in every field continues to increase human knowledge at incredible speed, forcing society into ever quicker and more radical adjustments. Unfortunately, the legitimate desire for scientific progress is threatening to push the boundaries of our exploration beyond what is acceptable. The spectre of a fully planned society with controlled birth and death now loom on the horizon, while stress factors associated with the changed times leaves humanity critically threatened with overload.

The challenge to the church as we approach the third millennium is to demonstrate the life and power of God in this new generation, showing the relevance of the gospel to the highly complex needs of our fast developing scientific and intellectual generation. In a generation demanding reality and relevance we must ask ourselves is the image of Christ we project a true one, and is our understanding of the church accurate? Are we trapped by its image of the Christ of the icon or crucifix still dominating our minds? Is our view of the church still the building on the corner, or the ornate cathedral in the centre of the city? When we speak of ministry do we think of professional clergy a vicar or priest in his vestments, or even an articulate high profile entrepreneurial TV pastor or evangelist?

To communicate the life of God effectively to our world demands that we look at ourselves and ask ourselves the question – are we the church he gave himself for or some poor 20th century replica of it? Are we doing things his way or our own? Sadly, suggestions that we ask these questions are often met with such sharp retorts as: 'Let's not argue about church government or methods, we are all seeking the same goal - the gospel to the whole earth. Let's concentrate on that rather than any "form" or "structure" that is of minor importance. It's the power of God that matters.'

On the surface, this statement might appear reasonable, perhaps even magnanimously all inclusive; but is it biblically accurate? Is God unconcerned with how His church is built?

When God told Moses to build a tabernacle, He printed its blueprint deep into His servant's mind and soul; Moses was told to build it 'according to the pattern shown' (Ex 25:40). God's requirements concerning materials, measurements and ministry reveal a divine concern for detail; every 'pin' and 'socket' was according to pattern. The fact is, *nothing* about the tabernacle's construction - or the ministry associated with it - was left to personal opinion or judgement, to be done just any old way.

Or consider the temple, built by Solomon according to the plans revealed to his father David - plans which were written 'by the hand of the Lord' [1Ch 28:19]. The intricacy involved in constructing the temple required the employment of very skilled craftsmen to get it right. The order of priesthood, the sacrifices, even the singing associated with the temple were all done according to God's direction. Can we really believe that God would show such concern for a tabernacle and temple - 'shadows' of the greater reality [He 8:5] - and then suspend all requirements concerning His church, its ministry and its ordering today?

This does not sound like form and structure are unimportant; in fact, even a cursory survey of the New Testament reveals that we simply cannot afford to think that God will tolerate slapstick efforts to build on top of His costly foundation. The apostle Paul took great care in laying a true foundation of understanding and practice of the life of Christ in the early church, and he warns those who would follow to 'be careful how they build upon it' (1Co 3:10).

Thankfully, we can confidently say that God is infusing His people in this generation with a renewed sense of the divine mind and capturing their hearts with His purpose. As Moses' heart burned with a desire to build what he saw on the mountain, so too are many of God's people aflame with a passion to build according to His plan in their generation. They are the repairers and *Restorers* for our time.

*Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt
you shall raise up the foundations of
many generations
you shall be called **the repairer of the breach,**
the restorer of streets to live in.*

(Is. 58:12 NRSV)

They believe God will bring His plan to completion in a single generation, releasing the greatest spiritual awakening ever known.