

Churches Filled with Non-Serious People

By Bob Young

A strange thing has happened to the church on the way from there to here. Over the last half-century, the life of the church has changed dramatically. The shared life of the church has changed; the lives of individual Christians have changed. The changes have been described in various ways. One description is that the church and its members have become “non-serious.”

A recent article described the change this way: “decision-focused evangelism has filled our churches with non-serious people.” With the best of intentions, we have sought conversions using motivations inconsistent with the message of the Gospel. Church membership has focused on salvation more than service in the kingdom. A selfish version of church membership has developed, designed to take care of #1 and try to guarantee eternity. The focus has subtly shifted away from faithful living as the final step of the oft-belittled “five step” process. The shift has ended the salvation process at baptism.¹ Christianity has become about getting more than giving. Perhaps it is related to our consumer-oriented society. Church is too much about “me”, not enough about “us”, and not at all about “them”.

The result is that people come to church with their own agenda more than with the desire to participate in God’s agenda. Instead of people being baptized and attending church regularly as a part of their new walk with Christ, people are baptized and darken the church door only infrequently or not at all as they begin their Christian journey. In a recent conversation, I asked the question, “What has caused this?” One sister said it is that we love self more than we love God.

Is the benefit-based version of Christianity a result of the surrounding culture or is it a part of the psyche of the contemporary church, one result of a systemic mentality that permeates the church of today?

It is time for the church to encourage every member to ask afresh, “Why am I a Christian?” Are we motivated mostly by what we can get out of it (including eternal salvation)? How does one “change” the focus from “I want God to save me” to “I am giving myself totally to God for him to do whatever he wants and wills in my life”? How do we incorporate the idea that I am committing myself totally to God’s agenda in this world?

¹ An earlier version, “Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized, Live Faithfully,” has been replaced by an updated version, “Heart, Believe, Repent, Confess, Be Baptized.” The shift is subtle, but the result is unmistakable. One’s obligation to God is ended at baptism.