

How Should We “Do Church”? (Part 1)

by Bob Young

A preacher friend of mine and I were visiting about the greeting program at the church where he ministered. He wanted to make some changes to insure better contact with visitors to the church. His problem? The same deacon had organized the greeters and managed the greeting program for a long time. It was generally ineffective. My preacher friend could not make any headway against some strong opposition to improvement and change. The only solution he saw was to leave the current program alone and institute a new program that would do essentially the same thing, only better.

In the course of our conversation, he mentioned a conversation with another minister friend. His friend works in ministry outside the churches of Christ. His friend was trying to help him understand why the churches of Christ are plateaued or declining in growth and are generally ineffective in touching the current culture and world. The comment of his friend was revealing: “You guys have the best preaching in the world. You know how to preach; you know how to work with the text. You just don’t know how to do church!”

You may or may not agree with this assessment of a person who understands ministry and is able to look at us with unbiased eyes, from a vantage point outside us. My worry is that he may be right. How should we do church? When we come together for worship, are our shared activities informed by Scripture (we would like to think so), by the world about us (God forbid!), or by a body of tradition and habit that has arisen over a long time (the most likely answer).

That this is generally true of our churches becomes more obvious when one spends a little time on the mission field. Our brothers and sisters in other places do a lot of things differently than we do. Visiting the mission field is fresh and vibrant. When I visit other places, I am challenged and encouraged.

Think with me. How must we change?

- We must focus on Christ. We must move from our historic focus on church to focus on Christ. Our allegiance is to Christ. He will never disappoint us. He is always the answer, to a whole host of problems. Christ is perfect; the church is imperfect. We are human. The church is not the goal, Christ is the goal. My little children, I suffer the pangs of birth for you, until Christ be formed in you. We conform our lives to Christ. He is our example and model. The model is not the NT church; the model is Christ. The church is the means to the end. This doesn’t mean we never talk about the church. You cannot have Christ without the church. But our focus is Christ.
- We must focus on Scripture more than tradition. We read the Scripture through the rose-colored glasses of our heritage and our traditions. We cannot change the slightest thing. We have lost freedom in Christ, exchanging it for a box of our own making.
- We must focus on others more than self. We must move from self-centeredness to others-centeredness. Christ did not come to the healthy, but to the sick. He did come to rescue saved people; he came to seek and save the lost. Frankly, what we do is mostly for us. We do what we do because we like it and are comfortable doing it. I could make a long list of things that we could do that would not contradict Scripture, but we will not do them because they contradict our traditions and move us outside our comfort zone.

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Here is a link to Part 2: www.bobyongresources.com/articles/how-should-we-do-church_2.pdf