

The Lakeview Lamp

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." - Psalm 119:105

February 24, 2008

The Subtlety of Institutionalism

Jason Moore

It used to be that folks canned their own vegetables. Now factories do for the many what the many once did in their own kitchens. Once, many a mother sewed her daughter's Sunday dress. In prosperous cultures clothing mills and shopping malls do for many a mother what many a mother once did in her sewing room.

This specialization, this automation, this institutionalizing of society can have its effect on Christians and their perception of the church. Succumbing to this pressure, there are church institutions like missionary societies and convalescent homes which do for the local church what the local church once did for herself. Churches take upon themselves the work of general benevolence, hospitality, education, even recreation which the Lord assigned to the home and the individual, and thus have sought to do for the home and the individual what these entities used to do themselves. In each case the work of the many is given to one who is ill equipped, and not commanded of God, to do for the many what the many could do better for themselves. The wisdom of God's foolish designs is magnified by the foolishness of man's wise and complex inventions. But churches don't have to build hospitals and gymnasiums and support missionary societies or sponsoring church hierarchies to become institutional in their thinking. It can happen in subtle ways. And Christians need to be on guard, challenging their own thinking and activity.

The church is made an institution when parents send their kids to Bible class to learn religion just like they send them to the public schools for a secular education. The Bible class should supplement, not supplant, the biblical instruction of fathers in the home (**Eph. 6:4**). If children grow up not knowing the Bible, not reciting its great stories, not fathoming its great promises, not understanding its great truths – it's not the fault of the church or her Bible class program. It is the fault of the parents. The Bible class is an expedient, not a command. "But bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" is a direct commandment issued to fathers.

The church is made an institution when Bible study is the work of the pulpit and not the individual (2 Tim. 2:15). When people leave their Bibles in the pew and don't read them at home, it's no different than when Bibles were chained to the pulpit and liturgy was read to the assembly in Latin. To whatever extent the individual Christian no longer feels responsible for knowing his Bible and defending the faith, but leaves it to the preacher or the elders, the church has been made an institution (**Jude 3**).

When all the evangelism, benevolence, prayer, song, and hospitality that takes place in a community of believers is of an organized, collective nature, the church is rendered institutional. When there is no private prayer, personal Bible study, family worship, individual hospitality, good Samaritan benevolence, and kitchen table evangelism, something has gone terribly wrong in the thinking of Christians (**Mt. 25:31-46**). The local church was designed to equip individual saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ (**Eph. 4:12**). When a church becomes institutional, the process is reversed; the individual saints equip the organization (the preacher, teachers, elders, etc.) to do the work of service for them and build them up at the same time.

Try this quick test to see if the subtlety of institutionalism has influenced you. When you cover up all the Sunday activities which you perform in the company of other Christians, what service remains? What Bible reading? What prayers? What songs? What teaching and encouragement? What evangelism? What benevolence and calls on the sick? If all our spiritual investments are Sunday morning contributions, then have we not allowed the influence of a specialized, institutionalized society to cause us to grow passive in our service? We then need to consider what personal changes we should make to reactivate individual Christianity as opposed to the institutional variety.

Live every day as your last – someday you will be right, and each day you will be ready.

It is better to be despised for doing right than praised for doing wrong.

Life is fragile – handle with prayer.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!” – Psalm 104:35

News and Notes

Mary Burnett is in Sumner Regional, room 233-A and does not know when she will return home.

Quinton Coppage came through his hip surgery fine last week. He remains in Skyline, room 703. His brother-in-law, **Noel Martin**, died this past week.

Metty Fain celebrated her 82nd birthday last week. She remains in Highland Manor Nursing Home; Room B2; 215 Highland Circle Dr; Portland, TN 37148.

Amanda Johnson was baptized into Christ last Sunday night after worship - which led to more worship!

Nancy Read is still having problems with her eye. She is scheduled to go back to the doctor on March 3rd.

Out of town, traveling, or visiting: None known.

New Reports from men we support: None known.

Note – If you have any news for the bulletin (out of town, sick, etc.), then please let me know by Saturday night. Thanks!
– Troy

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"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks" (1 Thes 5:16-18).