

The Unraveling of the Traditional Church...

by Kat Rowoldt



Something has happened, and is happening, to the mainstream traditional church as we have known it. It's not just dying, it's dividing/splitting - going separate directions. Last weekend, within four hours, I was involved in three separate conversations having to do with church struggles, departures, and new faith-based gatherings forming. That was in "Anytown," Texas, but it could have been most anywhere in the nation.

I was unexpectedly asked to stay over until Monday to speak to a lunch group, so filling in an unscheduled Sunday was quickly being planned by my host. He selected a Bible church that was meeting in a hotel for our Sunday services. It was a great choice, with a great message given by an elder. One thing was very unique about the attendees. I would dare say, the average age of the members was thirty years old. We were in a room filled, standing room only, with young couples who had little children. We were the oldest in the gathering - by decades. Loved it!

I'd love to follow up and see what was the nucleus or cause that had pulled this young group together. The missing generation was found! They were the most welcoming Church body I had ever experienced. They genuinely interacted with you with interest. It wasn't the usual dry, rather forced, smiles and welcome handshake. They really wanted to know who the new faces were and we came away knowing not only who they were, but something about each of them too. Awesome group that will surely grow quickly once they get moved into their new building.

At lunch, my host texted a mutual friend to see if he'd like to stop by for a minute at the restaurant where we were dining. Surprisingly, he altered his plans and joined us. As we were chatting, I discovered that a few months ago he had felt compelled to leave the church where he had been attending and had been one of the leaders for almost two decades. Reality was, while he was busy doing life, his church had been moving away from the foundation it had when he had first joined and was now embracing a more open theology in order to make room for today's culturally trending ideas.

When he realized what was now being preached and accepted in his church, he directly met with the leadership and asked if he was understanding things correctly. Upon confirmation of the facts, he formally left his church and

began holding his own worship services in a building he had on his property with his family. Today, there are thirty families sharing the experience with his family and counting.

We hurried from lunch to a meeting with a small group that are exploring doing a church plant. This group is searching for and seeking the spiritual gifts described in the New Testament. They have been disheartened by their former mainstream church, which just that week had held their convention and stated they would continue to be welcoming to homosexuals. This wasn't from the stance of homosexuality as being a sin that needs to be addressed, but rather accepting gay marriage into their denomination.

Wow. What a Sunday. What a day filled with serious conversation about today's church and where it is heading. I never dreamed my Sunday would place me in the whirlwind of this changing trend, much less times three.

January 2015, Martin Luther King's day in fact, my team hosted a Pastors & Politics breakfast. I still remember Senator Charles Perry casting the idea out to the pastors in attendance that the day may come when the church will not be able to have their 501(c)3. Since that morning, I have strongly sensed a splitting happening in the church.

The dividing factor is a defining of two church mindsets. One group is struggling with the trending cultures and trying to meet the ever changing needs of our society while satisfying the demands of staying neutral on all things political for their tax exempt status, while the second group is a new emerging force to be reckoned with. They are a group of Christians who could care less about a 501(c)3 exemption, but hunger after God's Word in Its purest form, power-packed. They resemble the Founding Fathers style of faith - bold, in your face, God's way or no way. I have met a pastor over the last year who has prepared his congregation to hand back their tax exempt status if it ever prevents him from preaching what God puts on his heart. Times are changing.

The next day, after speaking at the luncheon, a small group of us relocated to another restaurant so I could eat before getting on the road. Once again the conversation returned to what's happening in the church with now a fourth person sharing his story of leaving the pastorate at his denomination for similar reasons - church doctrine embracing today's sinful culture and not calling sin out.

It seems the church has desired to be seeker friendly, creating itself to be a comfortable place for sinners to come. Unfortunately, as it adapted to be appealing to the secular world, it embraced the secular world to such a degree that it was no longer different than the world.

Those seeking answers began finding a justification for their sins through what they were being taught about Jesus Christ. His act of love covered their continuing sin. What once was shunned in the church body, is now accepted as today's culture. Just to name a few: divorce, living together unmarried, premarital sex, children out of wedlock, homosexuality, gay and lesbian clergy, self-gratification, pornography, drugs, motivational lectures versus Biblical lessons from the pulpit, etc. This is today's acceptable culture and lifestyle.

Churches wonder why they have such a revolving door. They tally up hundreds of new faces each month, or year, but few, if any, stick around. Why should they? The church isn't offering anything any different than what the world keeps forcing on them. Just compare the divorce rate in the church with the divorce rate outside the church.

Now before all the Christians click off this article mad at me, YES there are exceptions to what I am saying. There are a few, and yes, I'm probably accurate with the term "few," that are living and experiencing a powerful faith-filled church body that honors God's Word by how they live and conduct themselves. Honestly, most aren't. Honestly, a large number of people attend Sunday social clubs and haven't picked up a Bible personally to read in years. I apologize for all the toes I'm stepping on, but we need a fresh awakening. The world is crying out for it because it has morally decayed and is spiritually bankrupt. Our spirit demands to be nourished.

501(c)3's are not Biblical. God didn't say to give so you can get a tax deduction. He did layout, however, how we are to live our lives. The church was designed to be a gathering place to discuss current events. Pastors have abandoned their pulpits in fear of offending and losing congregants or losing their tax exempt status. God designed the church to be where people would turn to learn how to think and act on social issues, how to vote (which is empowering those who will rule over you), and overall how life was to be lived to glorify God based on what the Word of God said.

One of the first things God did was to create/outline government. The church has always been actively involved, at least until they began believing there was supposed to be a separation of church and state. That separation was speaking about protecting people from a formal religion of the government. Hmmm, ISIS is an excellent example of a government forced religion/ideology. You must submit to their religion via conversion, paying a continuing tax, or die by the sword. No freedom of religion there.

Twenty years ago, the stats showed on any given Sunday you would only find 10% of the population in church. I would dare say that stat has shrunk even more. Sunday is no longer honored as a religious day set aside for faith and family, but now it's booked with children's soccer games and other events.

Those in attendance on Sunday can easily look up and down the row to see numerous folks checking Facebook and emails instead of listening the message. Children are totally tuned out with their entertainment device in hand. What happened to teaching your child to sit quietly and listen?

Yes, the traditional church as we have known it is unraveling to its demise. Yet, there is a remnant out there that is seeking the power, the life, and the glory that God has always intended for His Church to possess. This emerging Church will be the safe refuge where the tired, the weary, the sick, the lost, and the hungry can find their sustenance. They may not be in the traditional church buildings, but they will build the church that operates outside the four walls and impacts this final generation.

Until next time...

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