



Systems Religion - 2

As we continue to ponder Systems Religion, and its affects upon the Church, I'd like to take up the issue of Institutional Thinking.

Whether a person has ever been directly involved in the institutional Church, or not, they are not necessarily immune to the tendency of institutional thinking. The logic for such a statement is not complicated, once we understand where institutional thinking (IT) comes from.

If we accept that IT didn't come from God, and God is opposed to it, even though He often tolerates it, then the only other sources for it are the world, the flesh, and the devil. It appears that IT is most especially a component of the flesh, desiring to prop it's sense of self worth up, by achieving things designed to enhance image and authority.

Just being connected to the House Church doesn't guarantee IT won't attach itself to the style of leadership you operate in. Here are some of its manifestations:

- 1) Attempting to raise up followers, of the things you believe God has shown to you. A following must never be sought, only responded to when it happens. Jesus alone is a worthy focus.
- 2) Attempting to gain their submission, before the Lord has clearly spoken to them that your authority is solely derived from His Word, and not your sense of superiority or ego.
- 3) Failing to see your personal tendency to be controlling, puffed up, and so convinced of the uniqueness of your wisdom, that others simply "have" to hear you, so they too can be benefitted by your knowledge.
- 4) Unique teachings, designed to enhance the leader's sense of superiority and mystical wisdom. These things are such a trap, because once started there is never an end to the demand for yet stranger and more fantastic teachings. Rather than a simple focus on Jesus, they will focus the attention on unusual doctrines and distinct teachings.

Often these manifest in subtle, and almost undetectable sorts of ways. Often, only the most discerning will be able to see through these manifestations, and call it what it is. As a result, those who are less discerning will fall sway to the convincing nature of this kind of leader, and allow their lives to be dominated by their charisma, intelligence, persuasiveness, and persistence. It is the stuff of which cults are made.

Because God opposes the proud and exalts the humble, He will be faithful to bring alongside this kind of leader, those who have discerned the error of their thinking, in the hopes of exposing it, and delivering them from it. Generally, those who make such confrontations can expect strong resistance, and perhaps even prophetic threats. The

reason such resistance is met, is not as the deceived leader expresses it, but because that leader fears the loss of his following.

It is common for this kind of leader to express great concern for his confronters, as though, if they continue their confrontation God will bring severe discipline upon their lives, but those who know the truth will persevere through these threats and continue their confrontation, because they believe the hope for pure leadership is only going to be realized when they spot false leadership and consistently expose it.

Over the years, I have seen one consistent evidence of leadership failure, over and over again, and it surrounds this issue of security and significance. All humans struggle with it, but those called to leadership will experience it the most acutely, and the reason they do is so that they can conquer it first and lead the body of Christ out of it.

The entire institutional Church, whether it recognizes or admits it, is controlled by IT thinking, connected with fears of insignificance and insecurity. Unchecked, these fears have built every religious institution, every denomination, every "rule of one" pastoral philosophy, and all religious movements.

Only when we recognize and own these fears can we hope to be delivered from them and their effects, by submitting them to the Lordship of Christ for His healing. Jesus alone can deliver from such strong bondage. Generally it takes strong dealings of the cross to overcome these tendencies. Jesus knows just how to set the leader's life up, to experience sufficient trials, as to expose and deliver him. The pain is of the highest order, and the heart resists His attempts at every stage, but if He is allowed to complete His work, then a humble and true servant of the Lord will emerge, and the body of Christ will experience true leadership. All other forms are false and damaging to the Church.

We are living in a day (2007) where the Church in America is going through a great shaking. George Barna, of the Barna Research Institute, tells us, over 50,000,000 believers have left the IC in the last 10 years. People have been given a dose of divine dissatisfaction for a leadership that robs Jesus of His rightful headship, dishonors His place in His body, and wears them out with the seemingly endless approaches for robbing them of their time, money, and confidence in leadership.

As a result of this great exodus, Senior Pastor's, and rightfully so, are very nervous...wondering what the outcome will be to "their" Churches, "their" ministry, "their" security, significance, and income. The handwriting is on the wall, and they often, like Belshazzar was, are fearful of the implications of these things. God is confronting the religious idolatry of the Church's leaders, and some are resisting it with strenuous effort.

If the Church is to experience the fullness of the Lordship of Christ, under His headship, the changes that need to take place must take place. We are living in days of change, globally, economically, politically, and religiously. These are great days, but they are difficult days too.

Many currently coming out of IC settings, are doing so, not just out of desire for intimacy with Christ and weary of the IC distractions from it, but because they are sick and tired of being controlled and manipulated. Whatever the reasons, if the body is to be strong there must not only be a coming out, but a new coming together. The tendency will be towards "Lone Ranging," instead of intimate gathering.

The need is for true community to emerge, where lives are lived transparently before one another, goods and services are freely shared, and Jesus is known in the gathering. All too often folks come out, and then, out of fear of being falsely controlled again, maintain an aloof status with the body of Christ. This is an understandable reaction, but, if allowed to continue for long, can develop into an effective inhibitor to true community and the shared life of Christ.

Jesus is not building a Church of isolated living stones, separated from one another, and strewn across the terrain of life. He is building a beautiful structure in the Spirit, comprised of brothers and sisters who are joined together by their common bond in Christ, and their desire to share His life with one another. This place will become a habitation for the Lord, and a place of His pleasure. For this reason we must resist the temptation to isolate ourselves, out of fear of repeat failure, and trust the Lord to guide us into fellowships of hungry saints, who are searching for the city, that has foundations, and whose builder and maker is God. It exists, and it is worth the journey.

For those of you, currently in or out of the “system,” but suspecting your leader or leaders are of the sort discussed in this paper, my encouragement to you is to graciously and gently speak with them privately. It does not matter if they receive it now. You have formed a witness to the truth, which the Lord will be able to use at the appropriate time, when He has made them ready to enter in. Speak the truth in love, and let Him work out the results. If they refuse to hear you, then, rather than manifest dishonor for their spiritual authority, graciously let them know you will be leaving, and without fanfare follow the Lord wherever He leads you.

This is not a time to dabble in simple Church, done Jesus’ way. This is a time to give wholehearted and single hearted commitment to that which Jesus is revealing. Too many of us slip in and out of systems religion, using all manner of excuses and reasonings, when such behavior hinders our development of true community. “Come out of her my people” (Revelation 18) doesn’t sound to me like, go in and out of her. It sounds like come out and stay out. Don’t come out, and bring her with you. Don’t lead like she led. Don’t bring her systems into His Church. Don’t flirt with Jesus’ Church. Either commit to the Church, or continue in Babylon until you have to face the number of the beast.

I pray we will hear His call to come out and stay out. Her house is left to her desolate. Don’t try to make alive what Jesus is declaring as desolate.