

Does It All Boil Down to Pulpit & Pew?



My heart is burdened concerning a phenomenon I've witnessed over and over again. It goes something like this: *I would never pursue anything in my personal life in Christ without seeking the Lord for his will, but when it comes to my life together with others in Christ's body I pretty much accept church structures as they are in my community, and don't ask any questions.*

Many people exert great diligence about the Lord's will in how they live Monday through Saturday, but on Sunday they can step into a church building and just assume that what is going on is God's revealed will. If we have a passion to be led by the revelation of Christ in our personal lives, why don't we apply that same fervor to our pursuit of Christ in his Body? Why is revelation about our personal lives deemed vital, but revelation concerning Christ's church viewed as optional?

Some believers are brought to apply the same concern for the Lord's will in their personal lives to their practice of church. They often come to see—experience a “revelation,” if you will—that a lot of what goes on is human tradition, not the Lord's revealed will. Such traditions are not neutral. Jesus said that they nullify God's Word.

Many who have this revelation, however, end up returning to follow a church bulletin. This happens for any number of reasons. But my concern is this: *how can a person who has tasted something of what community is really about go back to feeling comfortable putting money in a plate and listening to a sermon?*

On the back cover of my book, *The Pastor Has No Clothes*, it says:

“The pulpit,” suggested Paul Watts in 2000, “stands for the authoritative Word of God, its public reading and preaching. The pew, through long usage, has become a symbol for the hearing and reception of that word.” Is this what church boils down to: pulpit and pew? You would think so by the prevalent ways church is practiced.

If somebody pointed out an area of your life that needed more of Christ, you would be very concerned. But people can go on year after year stuck in a pulpit-and-pew routine and never lift a finger to question the *status quo*. They know this way of doing things is not in the New Testament, but the religious machine is intimidating. Again,

why do people have no hesitation in being watchful in their *personal* lives, but show no concern for what is missing in their *body-life* with others?

As I've driven the roads across America this question has lodged in my mind: *Do we really believe that the tangled mess of competing church organizations, costly buildings, church politics and bureaucracy, inordinate focus on the pastor, and endless church splits are what Jesus had in mind when he announced, "I will build my community"?* I don't think so (Jon Zens, *A Church Building Every 1/2 Mile*, p.72).

If a friend told you that your life as a believer seemed to be veering away from Christ, your ears would perk up. If that same friend told you that church as pulpit-and-pew was far from Christ's heart, you might just shrug your shoulders and drive on to the building for the next service. I appeal to you to consider this: *that response is an approach to truth that you would never tolerate or condone in the living of your own daily life before Jesus.* I suggest that this is a troubling and deadly double standard.

Pulpit-and-pew have become everything in the Christian religion, yet there is nothing about them in the writings we claim to be a revelation of the Lord's mind. If anything I have imparted resonates within your heart, will you bring that to Father and ask him what implications there may be for you?

By Jon Zens