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## Church Without Buildings?

What is the place of buildings in our church system?

We give lip-service to the concept of God's people as the church, but actually we speak of our buildings as the church most of the time. "I'm going to church," we say. But that is wrong.

It is old covenant. We continually are trying to push people from the old covenant into the new covenant, but we ourselves have a mixture of both covenants. It is as if we were in bed with one husband, then in bed with another; we are a bit with the law, and a bit with Jesus.

We have been seeing that whatever was spoken before Pentecost concerned, in the main, a God who was outside of people. He gave a law, and people had to study it and try to do it.

Since Pentecost, God is on the inside. He leads us from within. This is what it is to walk in the Spirit. And it is a very different thing from the old covenant.

Under the old covenant, they went to church. But in the new covenant, we are the church!

This is not just a concept, it is a reality. And if we don't understand it, we are going to be very mixed up. We are going to be engaging in spiritual adultery, trying to live with both Jesus and the law.

The old covenant put the meeting place in the center, and we have copied that system. But when we put the building in the center, we are all wrong because we are reverting to an old

covenant situation—to a religious system.

Actually, we prefer a religious system in many cases because we can go to church on Sunday, then the rest of the week is ours. We do what we want then.

The commandment given to the apostles was, "Go into all the world."

But what do we say? "Let the sinners come to the church building."

Jesus never sang, "Come home, come home; ye who are weary, come home." He said, "*Go ye, go ye; ye who are lazy, go ye.*"

He never said, "*How beautiful are the tongues of those who preach the Gospel.*" No, He said, "the feet"—how beautiful are the feet of those who take the good news to every nation. It is a walking affair, a "going" thing. It is continual mobilization.

Our attitude is that we want a nice religion which makes us feel comfortable.

"Let's see how this pastor looks," we say to ourselves. "Ah, I don't like him. He's too short. He speaks too long. And I don't like the organ, either." This may be a common attitude, but it has nothing to do with the kingdom of God. Jesus didn't come to begin a nice club in which we all could feel comfortable.

Jesus never said, "Go into all the world and build temples and create church structures."

No, He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will build it up in three days." He was speaking of replacing the physical building with His own body. He was going to put a living temple in place of a stone temple. He was referring to you and me, who are His body, His temple. We have replaced the physical building.

The best years of the church, when the believers grew faster spiritually, had more power, more gifts, more revelation, and greater numerical expansion, came when they had no

buildings.

We have so many other things in place of the Spirit. We have Bible commentaries, Sunday School materials, beautiful buildings, pianos and organs. The Spirit could leave many of our churches, and we wouldn't notice it. In fact, many churches don't even know whether they have the Spirit or not!

The effect of this is to divide our lives into two—the spiritual, and the secular.

When it comes to our home, our work, our time, we say, "Pastor, don't touch. This is my personal life, so keep your hands off. Don't I come to the meetings? Don't I pay tithes? What more do you want of me? I am a faithful member of your church."

We think that the Christian life is in our meetings. Everything that we do in the building is the Christian life.

When the "alleluia's" are over we say, "Hello, did you see what the inflation rate is up to? Who do you think is going to win the election?" This is our other life—our personal, secular life which we live until the next meeting.

"Oh, he's a fine Christian! He comes every Sunday, and he attends all of the meetings during the week. He doesn't smoke, and he doesn't drink. What more can I ask?" says the pastor.

I'm not against meetings and buildings, but I am saying that Christ is the center. Going to meetings, in itself, is nothing in God's eyes. That's just religion. Jesus came to bring us life, 24 hours a day. He came to bring a new, alternative society, the kingdom of God.

In the primitive church they lived one life. We have one life with its focal point in the church building: this is our spiritual life. A second is our secular or home life.

Some good people have gotten mixed up trying to maintain two centers.

As soon as we moved to our new house we started to witness to our neighbor.

"Yes, I am a Christian," the neighbor said.

"Oh, wonderful," said my wife. "Which church do you attend?"

"I don't attend a church. It is a long story, but I will tell you in a few words," she answered.

"I went to a church. And I liked it, really. The pastor preached so well. I went to the front and they took my name. I started to go on Sunday mornings. But then the pastor told me that if I really wanted to be in God's favor I should go on Sunday evenings also. So I started to go Sunday evenings.

"Then the pastor said I should go to the Bible study as well. So along I went to the Bible study. Then they said, 'Why don't you also come to Sunday School?' So after the church service I stayed for Sunday School.

"Next they said, 'You should come to the prayer meeting.' Well, I started going to the prayer meeting also. And then it was, 'But you must belong to the women's society.' So I had to go on Wednesdays to the women's society. Someone noticed that I had a good voice, so they said, 'You have to join the choir because you have a good voice. You must use your talents to the full for Jesus.' That meant I had to go to the choir practice on Thursdays.

"I was in church almost every day, and I was neglecting my house and family. One day I said, 'I won't go any more, except Sunday.'

"The pastor began making all sorts of indirect comments such as, 'Oh, those Sunday comers.' It seemed to me this was because I no longer went to all the meetings. After several more Sundays, I stopped going."

Of course some people like to go to meetings all the time. Often it is because they have emotional needs. They weep when the pastor preaches nicely, or during beautiful songs.

If you need an emotional release, you can see a motion picture that will cause you to weep. But the Lord put you into this world to save the world, to expand His kingdom, not to

be entertained and to have your emotions touched in church meetings.

We are the light of the world. And the light has to be spread out to really light up the world. God put you in your neighborhood, and you are the light in that neighborhood. You are meant to shine there, in that darkness.

What does it mean to be a light? To be a light is to be a priest to all who are connected to the structure of your life.

First, I am to be the priest of my own home. The Bible clearly tells us this comes before anything else. If I am not a good priest there, there is little I can teach you.

The first requirement for those of us who are going to lead other people is that we are to have our own house in order—our own children in obedience to us at home.

When you read the requirements of a minister in Paul's first letter to Timothy, it doesn't say it is essential to believe in the millennium, in the Trinity, or in the tribulation. It says a minister has to be the husband of one wife, a respectable person; and he has to have his house in order. He also has to be hospitable. His family life is to be open for all to see.

In my situation, I travel a great deal—sometimes more than 50 percent of the time.

The Bible says a husband and wife can separate for a period of time if they are in common agreement. So when I travel, it has to be in full agreement. If my wife would not agree, I would have trouble. My life is committed to Martha and my children, so they come first.

When I was a pastor and also traveling, I saw it was too much. We decided I would have to give up pastoring, or give up traveling, because both things were too much for the family. So I gave up pastoring.

I was living in Buenos Aires and traveling around the world. I had to fly many hours to each place. The tickets were very expensive, so that meant I had to be away a month on each trip, and sometimes two months, which was bad.

We looked at how we could improve the situation. We decided to move to a more central location, close to an airport, here in the United States.

But there was still room for improvement.

One day my wife said, "When you come back from your trips, you have to go to the office and answer all the mail and plan your next schedule. I propose to help, so that when you come home you can be with the family more. I will answer all your mail."

Now, every evening I call Martha, no matter where I am.

We talk about all the things that she is thinking about. We discuss the mail and decide how we should answer it. Even the letters which arrive while I am at home, I leave and she answers them when I am gone.

I also do all my studying and reading on airplanes and in hotels. And I write all my cards and letters then. I do nothing at home. So at home I just have fun with my family.

We get up together, we do the beds together, we do the shopping together. And I cook when I am at home to give my wife a break from the kitchen. We do the gardening together, we paint... we do everything as a family. The children are included when they are at home. We go to soccer games, to concerts—wherever my family goes, I go with them.

We have adjusted to my traveling. This is Christ in us, showing us how to be creative in our situation. We have learned how to live in the situation with joy, not just bearing it, suffering it, or merely accepting it.

So Martha stays at home with joy, and I travel with joy; and we are very happy.

The idea came to me of having family meetings, like a business meeting. We have them every few months. We start with a special dinner, for which we all dress up in our best clothes. Then, after dinner we take our coffee into the living room, and we have a meeting in which everyone can say whatever he feels.

Our children tell us what they think we are doing wrong. And many times they have been right.

Before, instead of really listening to them we just rebuked them or punished them. But now, we listen to them as they explain their points of view. And even if they are wrong, we often see that they have the right motivation—and we should judge the motives, not merely the actions. So we listen to them, and they listen to us; and after we have talked everything out fully we make decisions.

We have made adjustments in our home in order to allow me to continue my teaching ministry. Actually, the reason I travel is because of our church system. I would not need to do it if the church were structured differently. But it is necessary because of the system. So we have made changes in our home to allow for it, because if I didn't direct my home properly I could not go and preach to others.

To be a light, the first place I must shine is in the home. This is my first responsibility.