

THE BODY OF CHRIST:

CHURCHES WITHOUT WALLS

Jesus declared, “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18 κγν). These words reveal that Christ’s church is on the move in enemy territory. The gates of hell shall not withstand the attack of the church. “I will build” marks the advancement of Christ’s kingdom and agenda. It will occur because the Lord of the universe has said it.

In this picture, who is on the offense? The church. Christ conquered the fear of death at the cross and death itself at the resurrection. He now is King of heaven and earth. Satan is on the defense. He lost the major battle of the war for the universe. He is in retreat. Christ is leading his forces in the mopping-up operations. We are to follow Christ and his banner to the very gates of hell.

The war continues between God and Satan, between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, between light and darkness, between life and death. The forces of evil are no match for the onslaught of the kingdom. The kingdom of God will prevail in the end.

This war manifests itself here on earth in very concrete ways that have consequences for both individuals and cultures. There are battles that need to be fought on many fronts. There is a battle for truth and against lies, for the culture of life and against the culture of death; another for justice and against corruption; another for beauty against the mundane and hideous; another for plenty and against hunger; another for economic sufficiency and against poverty; another for wisdom and against ignorance; and another for health and against disease. Servants of the King are to occupy themselves—using their natural gifts, talents, and abilities—to fight these battles. They are

to make a unique contribution, in their life and vocation, to occupy enemy territory for Christ.

As part of God's army, we do not fight with swords, guns, or bombs but with truth, beauty, and justice. We do not advance by ship or in tanks but on our knees and in humble service. As each Christian takes his place of deployment, he is to plant the banner of Christ.

THE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION



The war in which we are summoned to serve today has ebbed and waned throughout history, sometimes the kingdom of God advancing, sometimes the forces of darkness advancing. At this moment in history there has been unparalleled advancement in evangelism and church planting. There have never been more Christians or churches in the world than there are today. But the impact of the church on Western culture is diminishing dramatically. The kingdom of darkness is deeply impacting nations even as the church is growing numerically. The church has virtually lost the West to secularism, and secularism is collapsing under the weight of greed and corruption on its insufficient foundation. Postmodernism or neo-paganism is currently making strides for the hearts and minds of nations, especially in post-Christian Europe and the major cities of North America. In much of the developing world, the mindset and value system of spiritism continue to hold sway, diminishing the impact of the numerical growth of the church.

So what is the problem? The church, in our generation, has a mindset that Satan is on the offensive and the church is on the defensive. This mentality is exactly opposite from the teaching of the Scripture and is creating a defeatist mentality in the church.

We need to be reminded of who won the battle of the cross and who won the battle over death. Christ and his kingdom will continue to advance until his triumph is completed. He is the coming King of Israel written about in Isaiah 9:6-7:

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the increase of his government and peace
 there will be no end.
 He will reign on David's throne
 and over his kingdom,
 establishing and upholding it
 with justice and righteousness
 from that time on and forever.
 The zeal of the LORD Almighty
 will accomplish this.

God will accomplish his work of redemption completely. The gates of hell will not prevail.

If this is true, the church must have the mindset of pushing forward against the kingdom of darkness. She is to be proactive, attacking the very gates of hell, not disengaged or remote. Neither is she to be reactive—on the defensive, responding to the attacks of the kingdom of darkness.

The false mindset of the sacred-secular dichotomy is one that would see the gates of the city—the domains of government or media or science—as “the gates of hell” themselves. By their resulting separatist or antagonistic stance toward the world, evangelical Gnostics have sometimes shown that they (mistakenly) equate working in “the gates of the city” or “in the world” with working in the very gates of hell. Obviously this is not the case. The spheres of human society are ordained by God or grow out of our God-given mandate to steward all of creation. The harmony found in creation before the Fall is the goal of the end of time where there will be a harmony between man's creation—the city—and God's creation—nature.¹

Clearly the gates of the city, the domains of society, are not the gates of hell that the church is to move against; they are not the object of the church's attack. As Paul writes, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Like the broader cultures of which they are a part, the domains of society that we are called to occupy and influence have differing degrees of kingdom culture, counterfeit culture, and natural culture. We attack the gates of hell not by lashing out in frustration by ineffective action, nor by closeting ourselves away, but by manifesting more of the culture of the kingdom in the city gates. On the strength of Jesus' word, his church is to take the initiative. It is to take the

offense. Because Jesus has said so, truth *will* challenge the lie, good *will* overcome evil, love *will* overcome hate, and light *will* overcome darkness.

AN INCARNATIONAL COMMUNITY

What is the church? At her core, she is an incarnational community. At her core, she is not a building. She is not defined by her ecclesiastical structure and polity. No, she is a community of believers who are to incarnate the Word in a broken world.

First, the church is community. The church is described as the body of Christ,² the bride of Christ,³ and a holy nation and royal priesthood.⁴ These are all living, organic descriptions. The church is not static. What marks a church is her people and their life together, not the place or building where they gather, worship, and are equipped for battle and service.

A building may be the place where believers come together for worship and equipping, but the building is not the church. Rather, the church is a *community* of believers, a community of the redeemed through which God works. In identifying the church as the body of Christ, Paul reveals that this community is a unity of the diversity of many unique members⁵ with a variety of gifts, service, and ministries.⁶ This is a community that reflects God's own nature and purposes.

Second, the church is incarnational. Calling the church "the body of Christ" reminds her that she is an *incarnational* community. Just as Christ was "the Word [that] became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14), so now the Word (Jesus) is to be incarnate today through his church. As we have come to Christ, we have entered his kingdom. As the church, we are to live as he would live in the midst of the world.⁷

DUAL CITIZENSHIP

In *The City of God*, St. Augustine said that we are citizens of "two cities." Christ is the King of both heaven and earth, now and in the future.⁸ Because his laws are eternal and immutable, biblical principles apply in both heaven and earth. The Christian is, in each moment, a citizen of both heaven⁹ and this world¹⁰ and is subject to Christ's laws in both realms.

God's kingdom is now and not yet. The Christian is to live in the reality of the future return of the King while manifesting the presence of the kingdom in the world today. God's kingdom is fully established in heaven, and it is to be substantially advancing on earth now. This means that the Kingdom of Light will be challenging Satan's kingdom of darkness. The future aspects of the kingdom will achieve full harvest when Christ returns. His kingdom will be consummated under one rule. Shalom peace will reign! Until then, Christians will be citizens of two kingdoms, with a foot in each one.

THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

The church is to be at the same time both separate from the world (sanctified—set apart) and actively engaged (occupying for Christ) in the world. Jesus makes this clear when he prays for his disciples in the High Priestly Prayer at the Last Supper (John 17:15–19):

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

Directly before the journey to the cross, Christ prays for himself, his disciples, and all believers.¹¹ He prays for his disciples to be in the world but not of the world. What does this mean? There are two mentalities that many church bodies function by that oppose the correct concept of “being in the world but not of the world.” The first is what I call the fortress church.

The Fortress Church

The fortress church seeks to physically separate from the world. To use the expression of Christ’s prayer in reverse, the church is “out of the world and into the building.” The church, in an attempt to keep herself from the world and the devil, separates herself from the neighborhood by the walls of the church building. She leaves the world behind and disengages from culture. In this view, all that God wants is the church to be hidden behind the protective walls of an independent, isolated culture. Too often this has been the stance of many fundamentalist and evangelical churches.

THE FORTRESS CHURCH DISENGAGED IN THE CHURCH AND OUT OF THE WORLD



The Syncretic Church

The second mentality I call the syncretic church. In syncretism the church shares the same basic moral and metaphysical framework of the larger society. She is conformed to the world instead of being conformed to Christ. To warp the expression of Christ's prayer, the church is "in the world and of the world." In seeking to be relevant or attractive to society, she becomes like the society, indistinguishable from the culture. Rather than transforming culture for Christ, the church is transformed by the world until it is no longer distinguishable from it. Too often the so-called liberal denominations and many of today's "seeker friendly" churches have succumbed to this trend.

THE SYNCRETIC CHURCH
CONFORMED
INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE WORLD



The Kingdom Church

In the radical middle is the kingdom church. This church is engaged in society and at the same time is morally and metaphysically consecrated. To use the accurate expression of Christ's prayer, the church is "in the world but not of the world." The church is always reforming herself and seeking to transform society. She is always countercultural. She seeks to build kingdom communities and kingdom cultures that engage the world with truth, beauty, and justice.

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means "to call out." To be called out means to be called from something and to something. As the church, we are called out from the world's mindset, ethos, and aesthetic but not from the world itself. We are called to be set apart by Christ, to Christ, and for Christ.

We are called out of the world into the kingdom. But because we are to be in the world relating to it but not of the world, the calling out is a separation from the world's system, its mindset, ethos, and aesthetic, into the kingdom worldview and culture.

The church's calling is to be an incarnational community that reflects and exhibits the character of God. This calling out is to overwhelm the community and nation at

large with God’s fidelity, holiness, and beauty. It is to be a people with a different way of thinking (truth), a different way of living (virtue), and a different way of expression (loveliness, splendor).

The notion of being the “called-out ones” is true for both the universal and the local expressions of the body of Christ. The church is to be set apart morally and metaphysically but not physically. She is to be a holy and particular people¹² living in the marketplace and public square¹³ as incarnational communities. Individual Christians, the church scattered, are to be socially and physically engaged in the community and nation, bringing the kingdom into the world, in all the domains of society, while wholly consecrated, with a biblical mind, a biblical aesthetic, and a biblical ethic. The kingdom community is like salt and light,¹⁴ like leaven in the loaf:¹⁵ informing, explaining, enlightening, demonstrating, influencing, and affecting the community. It is not controlling, commanding, dictating, or manipulating. It is not disengaged, detached, isolated, or inaccessible. She is to be a lighthouse in the world, not a fortress against the world. She is to bring flavor, preservation, and cleansing, bringing life to the community.

THE KINGDOM CHURCH
REFORMING: IMPACTING THE WORLD
IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF THE WORLD



GETTING IT BACKWARD

Much of the modern evangelical church in the West has it absolutely backward today. It is both out of the world and conformed to the world. It is physically separate and metaphysically and ideologically conformed. Today the Western church is for the most part worldly—we act religious when gathered, and we act like the world when we are scattered. Too often, we act like Christians when it is “convenient,” when there is no cost.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was martyred by the Nazi Third Reich for resisting its claim to absolute power, decried the syncretism in the German church of his day,

which is so similar to the church in our own time. He writes of the concept of cheap grace that is the staple of both liberal and evangelical churches today:

If grace is the data for my Christian life, it means that I set out to live the Christian life *in the world with all my sins justified beforehand*. I can go and sin as much as I like, and rely on this grace to forgive me, for after all the world is justified in principle by grace. I can therefore cling to my bourgeois secular existence, and *remain as I was before*, but with the added assurance that the grace of God will cover me. It is under the influence of this kind of “grace” that the world has been made “Christian,” but at the cost of *secularizing the Christian religion as never before... The Christian life comes to mean nothing more than living in the world and as the world*, in being no different from the world, in fact, in being prohibited from being different from the world for the sake of grace [italics added].¹⁶

During the Third Reich, 90 percent of all Germans were professing Christians. But most of the church had totally submitted itself to the state. This sad condition permeates much of the Christian world today. In the Western church, Christianity is largely syncretized with secular materialism.

In observing our world today, it is clear that the true “success” of a church is determined not by the materialist criterion of its size and wealth but by the organic criteria of its godliness and its positive impact on the surrounding culture. There have never been more Christians in the world than there are today. There have never been more churches than there are today. There have never been as many large churches as there are today. Yet nations are still broken, impoverished, and enslaved. Individuals are shadows of the human beings that God intended. There is little substantial healing taking place.

Usually we get only what we set out to do. For the past fifty years, the mantra has been “church growth.” The church worldwide is achieving this goal. But to what end? Is the church alive, is the Word being made flesh in the lives of the believers, is the larger community and nation being transformed by the local church? Unfortunately there are too few places where communities and nations are being impacted, let alone transformed.

PROGRAM-ORIENTED CHURCHES

One reason for the failure of the church to impact culture is a misunderstanding of the church as a building or a set of programs. A program-oriented church (POC) is a church that defines itself by its programs. Its goal is to get people out of the world (the secular

place), into the church (the sacred place). The POC often sees the church as a building or as a people who are the church when they are in a “church meeting” or “doing church work.” These churches are defined by the weekly calendar of meetings and activities. Often the number of meetings attended marks a person’s spirituality. Often the success of the church is defined by the number of meetings and the number of people attending those meetings. The more meetings there are, the more “successful” the church.

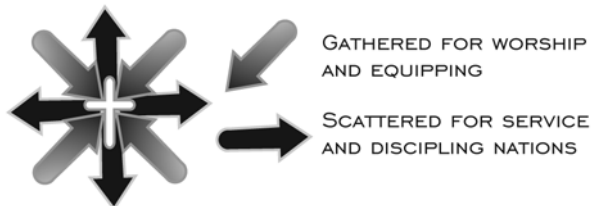
Author and theologian Elton Trueblood describes the error of this phenomenon: “It is a gross error to suppose that the Christian cause goes forward solely or chiefly on weekends. What happens on the regular weekdays may be far more important, so far as the Christian faith is concerned, than what happens on Sundays.”¹⁷ To this could be added that what happens outside the walls of the church building may have more to do with the advancement of the kingdom than what happens inside the walls. A university professor from Korea once lamented to me that the pressure of responsibility for the “jobs” and meetings he had at his church kept him from effectively functioning and ministering to his students at the university.

EVERY CHRISTIAN A MINISTER

In contrast to the concept of the church as a building or a set of programs, we are to realize that the church is an incarnational community.

The church gathers and scatters. It gathers for worship and equipping and scatters for ministry. In the program-oriented church the pastoral staff are seen as the ministers. The laypeople exist to support the pastoral staff in “their” ministries. In a kingdom-oriented church, the people are the ministers. The pastors’ and teachers’ function is to equip the saints for ministry, not to do the ministry themselves. We need to restore the ministers to the gates of the city.

THE CHURCH: GATHERED AND SCATTERED



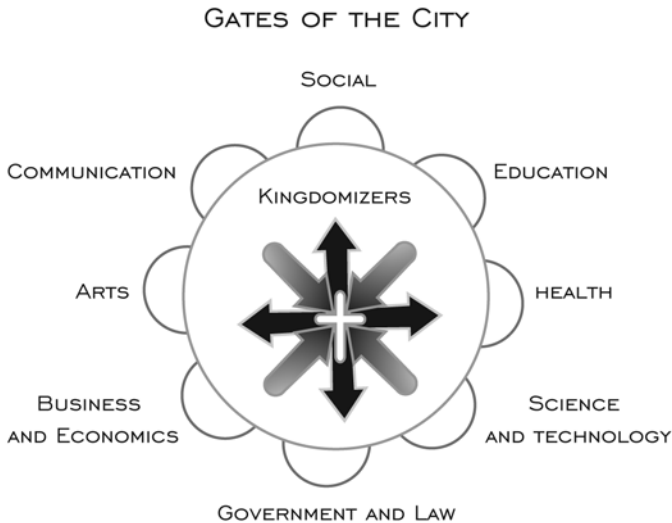
The apostle Peter reminds us, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9) The Scripture announces clearly that every Christian is a minister, every member a priest. This has

been called the priesthood of believers! I remember as a young man seeing the placard at the front of a church that captured this truth. It read:

The Pastor—the equipper;
The Congregation—the ministers!

Hendricks calls the layman “The New Clergy.”¹⁸ This captures the imagination. But it is not a new concept; rather, it is a biblical concept that has been lost and needs to be restored.

The Great Commission releases all Christians into the marketplace. When Christ says, “Therefore go” (Matt. 28:19), the phrase literally means “as you go” or “are going.” It assumes that the Christian is engaged in the gates of the city, doing business, carrying on relationships, hearing announcements, etc. The church gathers for equipping and worship and then scatters to the gates of the city to bring kingdom culture to the people.



Because evangelical Gnosticism has blinded the church in relationship to the Great Commission, it is worth addressing two issues that relate to “going”: the issue of deployment and the issue of vocation.

In terms of deployment, the evangelical Gnostic assumes that this passage addresses professional missionaries who are going to work overseas. However, a biblical worldview assumes that this passage is for all Christians wherever they are assigned. The second issue is that of vocation. Evangelical Gnostics assume that the passage is for

professional religious workers. Biblical theism assumes that all Christians are called into discipling nations, and it is further assumed that this may take place in any moral vocation. The priesthood of believers understands that all Christians are priests and that they have an assigned deployment or domain where they are to serve.

EQUIPPING THE MINISTERS

The church has a vital role to play in preparing Christians for their deployment in the marketplace and public square. George Grant summarizes the work of the church in raising up those leaders in his book *Changing of the Guard*:

The Church is to *train* God's people for the work of ministry. If our nation is to have thoroughly equipped pastors, then the Church must train young men for the ministry of the Gospel (Romans 10:14–15). If our nation is to have thoroughly equipped teachers, then the Church must train young mothers and fathers for the ministry of education (Titus 2:1–15). If our nation is to have thoroughly equipped craftsmen, artists, musicians, philosophers, doctors, laborers, lawyer, scientists, and merchants, then the Church must train them for the ministry of acculturation (2 Timothy 3:16–17). And, of course, if our nation is to have thoroughly equipped magistrates, then the Church must train them for the ministry of political action.¹⁹

What does it take to equip the ministers for the gates of the city?

First, it takes pastors and teachers being willing to equip the saints. The model of the pastor as superstar, doing the entire ministry, must be abandoned. So must the business model of pastor as administrator or business manager of the megachurch. Paul reveals the major role of the pastor and teacher in Ephesians 4:11–12:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Note the progression in this passage. The task given to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers is to equip the saints. For what purpose? For works of service. To what end? That the body of Christ might be built up.

The word *prepare* in Ephesians 4:12 is the Greek word *katartismos* which means “complete furnishing,” or “equipping”²⁰ As we have seen, the people—the saints—are the ministers. They need to be equipped for works of service. So, how are the ministers equipped for service? By those who have gifts in leading and in teaching the Word. The

role of equipping the saints is not higher than that of the ministers; it is merely different. It is not the role of pastor-teachers to do all the work of ministry, but it is their role to equip the saints for their assignments.²¹

Second, equipping the ministers for the gates of the city will take a consistent teaching from the pulpit on the theology of vocation. I have been a Christian since 1957. In all the years since then I have heard only two sermons devoted to the subject of work. The first was by Francis Schaeffer at L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland. The second was by a pastor in the U.S. who wrongly proclaimed that work was part of the curse. In reality, the cause of Christ can advance more during six days of the week than on Sunday, more in the marketplace than in the walls of the church building. Because of this, we need to spend more time teaching on subjects of the kingdom and vocation than on the solely "spiritual" focus found in so many churches.

Third, it will take discipleship classes to prepare people to work wholistically in the marketplace. In addition to speaking from the pulpit on vocational themes, there need to be cell groups, or kingdomizer classes, in the church to disciple Christians for the marketplace. We spend most of our time in Sunday school, Bible study, and even cell meetings to prepare people to function spiritually. We need to train businesspeople to be godly in their business practice and to bring kingdom principles into the marketplace. We need to prepare Christian lawyers and judges to seek justice in society and to drive issues to the supreme court of the land if necessary, not to simply make a living or give corrupt judgments, as happens in too many countries.

Fourth, it will take public acknowledgement to commission and send equipped businesspeople to minister in the marketplace; lawyers into the judicial system; public servants into government, the police force, and the fire department; stewards onto the farms, orchards, and vineyards; homemakers into the home. Each Christian is to be ordained for his or her ministry, to be set apart for the assignment given by Christ. The church is to release each person into his or her destiny.

Fifth, it will take cell groups of Christians, from individual domains in society, in a city or a country to apply biblical truth and principles in their own sectors. As an example, a church that has a medical worker can send him or her to a cell group of Christian medical personnel, not to simply have fellowship together but to develop a strategy for penetrating the hospital with the kingdom. On a state or national level Christian sectoral professionals can band together to seek to impact public policy and legislation for righteousness. This pattern may be applied for any sphere of society.

SENDING LEADERS TO THE GATES OF THE CITY

Restoring the ministers to the gates of the city is critical. Our communities and nations desperately need kingdom leadership. Pastor E. W. Lutzer, of the famous Moody Church

in Chicago, described the choice before today's church when he decried how the church in Germany failed to critique its own culture and was instead largely complacent with the rise of Hitler and even, for the sake of being good Germans, supported the Third Reich. Their choice is our choice: "The church had to choose between a Christ who was Lord over a shrinking 'spiritual sphere' and a Christ who was 'Lord over all.'"²² In his book *Hitler's Cross*, Lutzer shows that patterns exist today in the USA which are very similar to those that existed in Germany at the rise of Hitler's power. He challenges the church in the USA and, by implication, the church in the rest of the world:

If the cross of Christ is the greatest expression of God's love to the world, then those of us who follow him must show our love to the world as well.

It is time that Christians become leaders in art, education, politics, and law. Let's not make the mistake of the German church and isolate the spiritual sphere from the political, social, and cultural.

Since we share this planet with all of humanity, we must reestablish leadership in all of those areas where Christians often led the way. Education, politics, and law—here is where we must gain credibility so that the world will listen to our message. The Cross should be seen wherever Christians are found.²³

Leadership experts Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus contribute a similar theme:

If there was ever a moment in history when a comprehensive strategic view of leadership was needed, not just by a few leaders in high office but by large numbers of leaders in every job...it is now.²⁴

The domains of society are in need of kingdom leadership that manifests the true nature and purposes of God and his creation. The work of the church is twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, not just Sundays. It is in the world, not in a building. The work of the church is to bring the kingdom mind and value system into the world, not the world's mind and value system into the church. When a critical mass of members of Christ's body embrace their callings as his ministers and are equipped to live and work in the world as incarnational communities, truth, goodness, and beauty will flow with liveliness from the church into the community and nation. Through Christ's body, God will make himself known.