

THE ORGANIC CHURCH #1: WHAT IS ORGANIC?

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps you've noticed the new billboard sign as you came into church today. It says, "organic church." So what does that mean? Are we recycling more, or only using natural fertilizer in the flower bed?

Maybe we're just cashing in on the latest fad. You have organic milk, eggs, and carrots; why not organic church?

Well perhaps it's a bit trendy, **but what does "organic" mean anyway?** I think the best dictionary definition reads like this, "*characteristic of, pertaining to, or derived from living organisms.*"

If we're talking fertilizer or pesticide, it was made strictly from animal or vegetable origin. Organic products use only items that come from life to grow life, offering those who consume those products a healthier life. **So organic is all about living.**

But the question still remains- ***what is organic church?***

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PRODUCTS NOW THAT HAVE AN "ORGANIC" VERSION. WHEN YOU HEAR "ORGANIC" WHAT COMES TO MIND FOR YOU?

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS WOULD YOU EXPECT IN AN "ORGANIC CHURCH?"

THE CURRENT CHURCH SITUATION

Before I answer that, let's step back and **look at the current state of what we call "church"**: One of the Wednesday night connection groups looked at an observation that haunted the author of their book. The insight came from an Anglican minister who said; ***the religious struggle of this century is between Marxism, Islam, and third world Christianity.*** Western Christianity doesn't enter the equation because it is too weak and ineffective.

This is truly haunting because the same message is coming from such a wide variety of sources. In this case an Anglican minister is quoted by a Baptist writer.

Our elders are going through an intense study by Christian researcher, Dwight Smith. Smith has done demographic research on the ebb and flow of the church all around the world. And he has reached some disturbing conclusions.

For a start, he concludes ***Christianity in Western Europe is dead.*** By that he means less than 4% of the people have any form of a Biblical faith. The Christian population has dropped below the critical mass needed to revive itself. Without miraculous intervention of God, or movement of people from outside, Europe is spiritually dead.

And what is replacing it? -Postmodern skepticism, in other words, a sense of nothingness, and a tradition that's quite quickly being replaced by an exploding Islamic presence.

How about America? According to Smith's research, it sits around 9%, and is falling quickly. If the present trend persists, Christianity will be effectively dead here within two decades. We think we have to swim against the cultural stream now, just imagine what our children, and our children's children will have to face! -And that is, if they even hold to their faith at all.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS LEAD TO THE FALL OF CHRISTIANITY IN EUROPE; IN AMERICA?

WHAT THINGS DO YOU THINK ARE REPLACING TRADITIONAL VALUES THERE; IN AMERICA?

However, at the same time, God has been moving. South America had been a dead zone for centuries. Catholicism had a hold, mingled with native beliefs. Missionaries who worked there in the previous generation, were lucky to see more than a few churches take root in their lifetimes. However, in the seventies, there was a huge explosion of spiritual growth in these countries.

For example, Argentina went through a spiritually dark time into the early 80's. Then there was a revival that caught the world by surprise, it spread like wildfire with all kinds of miraculous things happening.

A quote from the study of Argentina by Peter Wagner says this:

The largest church in downtown Buenos Aires is pastored by Hector Gimenez, 33, an ex-drug addict and gunfighter. He started the church in 1983 and now leads a congregation of some 70,000. The official name of the church is The *Miracles of Jesus Renewed Christian Church*, but it more popularly carries the name of Gimenez's radio broadcast, "*Waves of Love and Peace*." ... A study by a Polish sociologist estimates the attendance at 14,000 daily.

The same phenomenon is happening in China, India, and parts of Africa.

There is a level of spiritual conviction that is standing up, even to death itself. Did you know; there are now more churches in India than there are in the United States?

Look at the global movement and you cannot help but ask: In our area where Christianity is so easy, so well financed, so well educated, so respectable; **why is it so impotent and diminished?** Yet, in regions where the church has no money, little education, no respect, and is brutally persecuted; it is **an unstoppable movement**.

To a large part, the answer is on that curious billboard we have out there; "**The Organic Church.**" It is far more than a trendy phrase; the principle behind it is why the west is withering and the third world church is flourishing against all odds.

In our cultural compromise, we have forgotten this fact: **the church is organic.** With the rise of organizations, corporation-type hierarchy, business-style evangelism, offices and committees, the **western church has forgotten it is a living thing and not an institution.**

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It is evolving more and more into a mechanical device; into a segment of the service industry: It gives therapy so people feel better, it draws them with entertainment-based programs, it caters to what people demand, it tells them what they want to hear; it address everything but the ***spiritual issues and practices to which God has called it.***

It's a great way to run a service institution, but it doesn't look much like the spiritual bride of Christ.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

THE SPIRITUAL TEMPERATURE IN ARGENTINA ACTUALLY FELL SO LOW THAT THEY HAD BUILD A MOMUMENT TO WITCHCRAFT IN THE CAPITAL CITY. THAT WAS FOLLOWED BY A MOVEMENT OF ABDUCTIONS BY THE GOVERNMENT. HOW DID SUCH A DARK PLACE SEE A SPIRITUAL EXPLOSION?

WHAT THINGS HAVE YOU HEARD FROM COUNTRIES SHOWING THE RISE OF CHRIST AMONG THEIR PEOPLE? (GOOD AND BAD)

CHURCH: THE BIBLICAL DESIGN

Let me share some amazing Biblical imagery with you:

1Pe 2

3. if indeed you have ***tasted that the Lord is gracious.***
4. Coming to ***Him as to a living stone***, rejected indeed by men, but ***chosen by God and precious***,
5. ***you also, as living stones***, are being built up a ***spiritual house***, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
6. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a ***chief cornerstone***, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."
7. Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The ***stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,***"
8. and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Before we even get into the imagery, there are a few basic phrases we need to soak in:

"Tasted that the Lord is gracious."

This isn't speaking in the ***abstract***. This is talking about an actual encounter with the grace of the Lord. This is about "tasting" Him.

Turn it around- even if we call ourselves a "*church*" but do not experience the power of Grace; if we have no direct experience in what God is doing, then the rest of the passage is moot. It means nothing; it isn't even speaking to us.

"Chosen by God and precious"

Whatever this passage is talking about, this is what God chooses. This is what God really values.

"Spiritual house"

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Whatever is being described, it is not a *lifeless institution*. It is not “big business.” It is something that has no parallel in this physical world.

So what is God talking about? He is talking about *life*, or the *absence of life* in this entity we *think* we know, and call “the church.”

But if we miss *this*, we miss *Him*. There are fewer things more important for you to understand than this concept of “organic church.” ***The church is a living organism.***

And this is where it gets truly genius. ***God uses the most inert thing to explain life; rocks; stones.*** (*And by the way, it's not new; it's borrowed from Isaiah, 700 years before the New Testament.*)^{Isa 8:14,15}

It starts with ***Jesus as a stone***; but not just any stone, it's “a *living* stone.” And this “living stone” isn't very popular in this world. In fact, it is generally rejected. And more than rejected, it is an ***offense***. The world says, “*What an ugly stone! What a foolish and useless rock!*”

But to God, ***He is unbelievably precious... why?*** Because there is more life in Him than the human mind can possibly imagine. In fact ***He IS life***. All things were created through Him, for Him, and in Him everything is held together.^{Col 1:15-18}

So since the world rejects Him, He has become a stumbling stone. But the truth is; He is really the *cornerstone*, the *load-bearing stone* of a beautiful *living temple*. -An “organic temple”; that is made out of life.

Then God takes this imagery and ***turns it 180 degrees***. ...Because the Lord is a “living stone,” and you have “tasted” Him; you have assimilated Him in yourself; ***you in turn become***... guess what... “a living stone!”

You are a precious stone in this living temple.

Let's go back for a moment, to the ***first Jewish Christians*** and try to appreciate some of the ***richness of this imagery***. These people had *lived* the history of the *physical* temple. They walked by the city wall of Jerusalem. When they looked at those stones, they saw ***more than stones***.

They knew the history behind those stones, they knew of Nehemiah rebuilding the wall even in the face of murderous enemies.^{Nehemiah 4:15-16}

Every stone in the temple, every stone in the holy city's wall had a life story. And in this new, living temple, every stone *is* a life. It is organic, it is *100% living*. It is living God bonded to living humanity; spiritually alive.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHY DO YOU THINK GOD USED STONES AS THE BASIS OF THIS IMAGE?

WHAT ARE SOME OBSERVABLE TRAITS YOU WOULD EXPECT TO SEE IN A “LIVING CHURCH?”

WHY IS A CHURCH A LIVING ORGANISM?

CHURCH: THE LIVING ORGANISM

Let me show you a little time-lapse video (beans growing). That is the miracle of life. How did it happen?

Any living organism is made up of living cells, each doing its part. What's more, there is an overriding power that coordinates all those cells into ***the same purpose***.

The design of the life is far greater than any single cell. Life cannot be life unless, ***first***, the ***individual*** cells are alive; and ***second***, they are coordinated by a power ***larger*** than themselves. ...Living cells that just grow for their own sake have a name; it is ***cancer***. ***And while cancer causes explosive growth of some individual cells, it can ultimately kill the larger organism.***

The same is true in this living organism called "***the church***." God is able to bring each of us to life ***individually***, but it is for the purpose of the ***whole organism***, the church.

In the weeks to come, we'll delve into the fuller implications. But if you can ***take away this one reality***; the ***church is a living thing***; you have opened the door to God's real design. And in grasping the real design of the church, ***you are in a position to experience the real design of God.***

Like most profound things; this one sounds simple, but it has life-changing impact; ***if you get it.***

CONCLUSION

Let me give you two questions to take with you. This isn't simply a way to wrap up a sermon; I would like you to seriously consider them over the next week:

- 1. What does it mean; what are the implications of belonging to; not an institution, but a "living organism?"***
- 2. Are you ready to live in a life, far greater than just yourself?***

INVITATION

The church is the collective body of God's people bound together ***with, for, and through*** God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). ***Anything else is a cheap "knock-off."*** ***It is all about life.*** But to be a part of this beautiful thing, ***you*** must be alive, in the spiritual sense.

Scripture says to do that- ***we must confess Christ with our lips and believe in our hearts***; that is not a onetime event, but a daily event. But it has to start somewhere. And some point there has to be that first, honest step.

We'd love to have you has part of this "living church" and more importantly, God is calling you to be apart; to be alive in Him. So with heads bowed let me ask for a simple but honest response; decide. If you haven't already; decide and live. Just raise your hand and we'll pray together...

And then for all of us; a closing blessing and two questions two take with you: What does it mean to be part of a living organism? Am I ready to live my life in that larger life?

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WHAT ANSWER DID YOU HAVE FOR QUESTION ONE FROM THE CLOSE OF THE SERMON?

IF YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION TWO WAS YES, WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS YOU PLAN TO DO THAT?