

## **Bizarro Church**

This is a difficult article to write, but a necessary one. The topic at hand is how most Churches in modern day America are structured. This subject is looked at through the “lens” of a sensitive subject, the issue of judging others. Many will no doubt find it troubling to even hear it suggested that the structure of their Church should be examined, and most will find it downright offensive when it is suggested they might need to implement change. But in the interest of obeying our Lord, the one who bought us with His own blood, and bringing Him the glory He is due, should not the foundation be periodically checked to make sure it is not sinking? Culture has an insidious way of creeping into organizations aimed at displaying the glory of God, and culture is in no way based on the Word of God. The article is short and the topic is urgent and extremely important, so please press on. Read what is presented and seek God through prayer and study as to if what is outlined here has merit.

In order to examine this in a brief but thorough manner, we will need to look at some uncomfortable verses, and open our minds to the fact that maybe the Bible really does have something to say as to how we “do Church” here in America. Maybe we are doing it right, maybe not. Let’s see what Scripture says. In James 4:11-12 we find:

**4:11 Do not speak against one another, brothers and sisters. He who speaks against a fellow believer or judges a fellow believer speaks against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but its judge.**

**4:12 But there is only one who is lawgiver and judge – the one who is able to save and destroy. On the other hand, who are you to judge your neighbor?**

When James speaks a warning against judging, he is speaking of setting standards for your fellow Christian Brother or sister higher than those set by God. By condemning what they eat or drink, how much church involvement they have, or how eloquently they pray, we condemn God’s Law as insufficient or incomplete, as it does not address such things. When we pass such judgment we arrogantly state that we have higher standards than God. This insults the Lord and trivializes His Law, as well as bringing about division, arguments, and gossip. We are not to judge how another serves his Master. This warning against judging a fellow Christian is in alignment with the warnings of Paul, when He was addressing a group of believers in Romans 14:4:

**Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? They are responsible to the Lord, so let Him judge whether they are right or wrong. And with the Lord’s help, they will do what is right and will receive his approval.**

By now you are thinking “What does any of this have to do with how American churches are structured and run?” Well, we will get to the structuring of the church in a moment. First, let’s look at another passage, this time in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5...

**5:1 It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, the kind of immorality that is not permitted even among the Gentiles, so that someone is cohabiting with his father’s wife. 5:2 And you are proud! Shouldn’t you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you? 5:3 For even though I am absent physically, I am present in spirit. And I have already judged the one who did this, just as though I were present.**

5:4 When you gather together in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I am with you in spirit, along with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5:5 turn this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough? 5:7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch of dough – you are, in fact, without yeast. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

5:8 So then, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of vice and evil, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. 5:9 I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. 5:10 In no way did I mean the immoral people of this world, or the greedy and swindlers and idolaters, since you would then have to go out of the world. 5:11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who calls himself a Christian who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater, or verbally abusive, or a drunkard, or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. 5:12 For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Are you not to judge those inside? 5:13 But God will judge those outside. Remove the evil person from among you.

Here, Paul is addressing a situation in which a professing Christian and member of the church is living in rebellion and immorality. Although this man believes himself to be a Christian (a belief most likely shared by the local church members), Paul makes it clear he is not. How can we be sure this is Paul's view? In the statement "...so that his spirit may be saved" (found in verse 5) it is obvious that Paul does not consider this professing Christian & Church member to be saved at that present time. Paul also states in verse 6 that a little yeast affects the whole batch of dough, meaning just a little sin affects the whole camp. Paul then commands the local Church to judge and discipline the Christian imposter.

V5 "Turn this man over to Satan..."

V7 "Clean out the old yeast..."

V12 "For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Are you not to judge those inside?"

V13 "Remove the evil person from among you..."

This removal of the unrepentant sinner from the Church has parallels in the Old Testament when the people of Israel were told to take those who were unclean, or broke certain laws of God, "outside the camp" and away from the populace of His chosen people. Paul also makes it clear in verse 12 that we are not to judge those in the world. By no means are we to embrace what those in the world embrace (no matter how "relevant" it makes us) but we are not to judge them either.

It is clear. We are not to judge the lost people in the world, but we are commanded to judge those who are religious imposters to retain the purity of the Church, and for the hope of true repentance and salvation of the one posing as a genuine Christian.

### **So, what does all THAT mean?**

So what does this have to do with how the majority of American churches are structured?

Consider this:

- The Bible states judging fellow Christians is wrong.
- The Bible states that the judging of those in the world is wrong.
- The Bible commands us to judge the unrepentant, worldly person inside the Church, & to act upon that judgment by removing them from the Church. This is not considered judging a Christian because they are not truly saved.

But what is the actual reality inside most American churches? It is this...

- We judge other Christians because they have a glass of wine, smoke a cigarette, or don't seem very "Christian".
- We judge politicians, celebrities and neighbors as immoral and worthy of condemnation.
- We invite the unrepentant into our churches in hopes they will come to know Christ once they are there.

Do you see the problem? The modern American Church is a polar opposite of what is outlined in Scripture! The popular idea of a church in America is that it is a place where someone goes so they can come to know God. This goal is often one of the primary purposes outlined in the "Mission Statement" or "Doctrines of Belief". Churchgoers are encouraged to invite their neighbors and townfolk to church, where they can be befriended by believers and eventually converted. Often this is called "friendship evangelism."

But in our attempt to be modern, relevant and loving, we have disobeyed our Lord's commands. We have not just left sin in the camp, we have invited it in. We are intentionally putting yeast in the dough, and bringing corruption into the Church with the hope that everything will work out after that. We trust our own wisdom and tactics to bring the unrepentant closer to Christ rather than obeying our Master and following His clearly stated structural outline. So how exactly are people to come to Christ if not at Church? What is the plan our Master has in mind? You! Me! All of those who have been saved! Look at what the Bible says...

**And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. Mark 16:15**

**How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14-15**

**...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:8**

Every person who has been saved is an evangelist. It is everyone's privilege to share the good news of Jesus with others. Once someone has repented of sin, called upon Christ for Salvation, and has vowed to serve their new Master they become a "New creature". It is then that they are saved. It is then they should be invited to join the local body of believers, purified by the blood of the Lamb, which they will find to be of one spirit.

**Please do not misunderstand!** If someone wishes to come to Church, in no way are we to lock the door. God forbid! But the Gospel (repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name) needs to be shared with them before, during or after the service. If someone unknown shows up at your church, a plan should be in place for someone to introduce themselves, find out where they stand in Christ, and share the Gospel, if the Pastor has not done so during the service (and shame on him if he has not!) Many reading this will no doubt recoil at this thought. “The visitor may be uncomfortable!” you might say. “They may be offended! That may have worked back in Biblical days, but not in modern times! The visitor will not find us to be at all relevant or accepting!”

But I ask, what could be more relevant and important to them than salvation? I also ask you to examine yourself as to why you so worried about them being offended?

Do you fear God...or man?

**Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.** 2 Timothy 1:8

**I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...**  
Romans 1:16

**Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.** 2 Timothy 4:2

**Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.** 2 Timothy 3:12

Preach the Word! In the very same way Paul did, we must count the loss of everything else as garbage.

### **The Truth of the Matter is This....**

We are to “do Church” with the goal of bringing glory to God. It is not our calling nor is it in our authority to utilize culturally savvy business abilities in the hopes of being relevant. Obey God in regards to how we do Church, and base the entire foundation of the Church on the Word of God. If we become like the culture in order to appeal to the culture, it serves as proof that Christ is not in us. If the World hated Him why do we think it will be OK with us? Are we so enlightened that we can bring the Gospel message better than Jesus Christ Himself was able? What pride is shown by those who think they can present the true Gospel of Jesus Christ without bringing offense!

Encourage and lift up your fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Pray for them, confront them when they are in error, and humbly submit to Christ when confronted yourself. Judge not those in the world (we were once like them) but instead reach out to them with the only message of hope (repentance and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus name). Pray that God would grant them repentance.

And please, please, I beg of you please.... Stop trying to make the Church comfortable for unrepentant and rebellious people. If they are comfortable it means there is a problem, a big problem. Stop inviting in the yeast and then jumping thru hoops to keep it there. The Church is the Bride of Christ. We need to stop trying to defile her.