

What Churches Need More Than Anything (1)

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Generally speaking, churches are in trouble today. Many congregations and most denominations are losing members. They are shrinking rather than growing. Especially tragic is the fact that they are losing their young people, so that there is a gradual graying of the pew. Many of these shrinking congregations are also not very attractive to those outside of the church, so that they are not gaining great numbers of members from the outside either.

In order to counteract this problem, churches today are trying many different things. They are trying to find what they need to continue thriving and growing. Some of the things that they believe will ensure that they thrive and grow include more youth programs; multi-million dollar additions to their church buildings for gymnasiums, rec. rooms, etc.; and becoming more involved in various community social programs. In addition to this they attempt to reinvent a proper worship of God on the Lord's Day, including all sorts of unbiblical and foolish activities in worship calling all of this "liturgical renewal." Many are even open to what is called by some "theological pluralism," meaning simply, that any theological idea or system of theology is permitted in the congregation as an equally valid interpretation of the truth of the Scriptures.

For the most part, these things are not working. Despite much energy expended, much money spent, these things are not achieving the desired result. Churches try one of these ideas after another only to find that each new change leaves them ultimately unsatisfied and leaves them without the desired result. Admittedly, in some cases, these attempts to counteract the problems of the church seem to be working. Some of the churches employing these tactics have developed into "mega churches," congregations numbering in the thousands, and continue to grow. But that which seems to be success is not real success. And even these apparent successes are only temporary. This is the case, because all these things are not what churches *really* need.

On the other hand, there are churches that are growing without resorting to these previously mentioned tactics. By God's grace, among these churches are the Protestant Reformed Churches. For the most part, our church buildings are full for services on Sunday. In fact, they are full for services *twice* each Sunday. Our churches are retaining their youth; many strong young families can be found taking their places beside gray-haired saints in the pew. Our churches are also being joined by others from outside the denomination. The Protestant Reformed Churches are small in number as churches go, but nevertheless growing, young, strong and healthy.

We are not this way because we are simply great people, or because we are more brilliant than others, or because our ministers are so holy or so nice. Rather, we have what churches really need today. We have a knowledge of the truth in the pulpit and pew because that truth is included in and taught by faithful preaching of the Word of God. And this is what churches need more than anything else.

Note this well—we have this in our churches by God's grace alone. We do not mention that we have what churches need in order to brag or boast. But we do not clothe ourselves in a false humility either, pretending that we do not notice God's tremendous blessings on us as churches. Rather we rejoice in this gift of God to us. And in gratitude to Him we want to thank Him, to speak of it among ourselves, and to tell others, too, about this gracious gift. God has given us the truth! God has given us faithful preaching! And we see the blessed result of these gifts.

But how does one *know* that this is what churches need more than anything? How do I know what churches need? The only way to know what churches need is to listen to what Scripture says. The Word of God—indeed, God Himself—tells us what His church needs. It is not up to any man to decide what churches need. It is not up to any theologian, pastor, youth group or worship leader, or anyone else to be imaginative or creative regarding what their church needs. This is where so many churches go wrong today. They see there is a problem and then rely on their own ingenuity to find a solution. But the church is not a business or any other man-made organization. And therefore does not benefit from human ingenuity that does not submit itself to God's Word.

God tells us, and God alone tells us, what His church needs in order to thrive and grow. If you remember anything from this article, remember this: God decides what His church needs. No man may decide.

God in scripture tells us what His church needs. He tells us that she needs the truth. He tells us why she needs the truth. He tells us why it is so serious not to know the truth, and why the tendency toward ignorance of the truth exists in the church. He tells us what this truth is at its heart, and He tells us how a church can gain and keep this knowledge of the truth in her midst. These are the subjects we will explore in future articles.

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