

GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE CHURCH

jkroberts_us@yahoo.com

Ephesians 4:1-6

1. The Apostle Paul pointed out that the last days of the church age would be characterized by apostasy on the part of that which calls itself the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. 2 Thess 2:3
3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first.
 - b. 1 Tim 4:1
But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.
2. Three areas where apostasy is evident immediately come to mind.
 - a. The Bible is no longer the final authority on matters of faith and practice for many professing Christians and churches. Jude 3-4
3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith (the body of truth) which was once for all handed down to the saints.
 - b. Preaching has taken a back seat to other forms of communication. 2 Tim 4:1-5
I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.** 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.
 - c. God's will has been replaced by human desire and personal preferences.
 - Some time ago I read a statement by a mega-church pastor who said, "It's all about the music." (I thought it was all about Jesus.)
 - There was a time when evangelical churches differed on minor points of theology and church polity.
 - However churches that professed to believe the Bible shared a common understanding of what constituted the Gospel, they agreed on the fundamentals of the faith, they believed that the Bible was the word of God, they sang the same hymns, and they embraced common moral and ethical standards.
3. For many, church affiliation is based on personal preferences related to worship styles, music, and sermon content that is personally pleasing and uplifting from a human perspective.
4. Church growth experts tell us that it is almost impossible to build a cross-generational, multicultural congregation in America today-you must target the group you want to reach.

5. How different from the churches we read about in the New Testament.
 - a. The churches of Galatia were made up of Jews, Greeks, male and female slaves, and free-men and free-women. Galatians 3:23-29
 - b. On Crete the churches included older men, older women, young men, young women, and bondslaves. Titus 2:1-8
 - c. In writing to Timothy at Ephesus Paul spoke about older men, younger men, older women, younger women, widows, children and grandchildren. I Timothy 5:1
6. Paul taught that Jesus broke down the barrier of the dividing wall that separated Jews and Gentiles. Ephesians 2:14
7. James declared that churches were to be inclusive and not exclusive. James 2:1-7
 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism (or personal prejudice). 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?
8. I believe that:
 - a. The preaching and teaching of God's word must remain a priority.
 - b. That a church's music should be distinctive from that of the world, and that our model for church music should be the Psalms.
 NOTE: The Psalms were set to music and they were designed to instruct as well as inspire. Some were historical, others were prophetic, many taught doctrine, while still others were Messianic, or personal. They contain praise, doctrine, and theology.
 - c. Churches should strive to be inclusive and a reflection of their communities or area.
 - d. Pleasing lost people and catering to selfish, self-serving people should not be the goal of any church.
9. The passage before us reveals some aspects of God's design for the church.

I. We should share one ambition-to honor our calling. 1

A. Think of the privileged position we have.

B. Note the following Scriptures.

1. Children of God. 1 John 3:1-3

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

2. Temples of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor 6:19-20

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

3. Ambassadors for Christ. 2 Cor 5:20-21

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

C. We honor our calling by purifying ourselves, glorifying God in our bodies, and faithfully representing Jesus Christ on the earth.

II. We should manifest one attitude characterized by: 2

A. Humility: complete lowliness of mind. (inward humility)

B. Gentleness: meekness, mildness. (outward humility)

C. Patience: fortitude, long-suffering.

D. Tolerance: make allowances for.

E. The Amplified Bible reads, "Living as becomes you-with complete lowliness of mind (humility) and meekness (unselfishness, gentleness, mildness), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another."

III. We should have one approach to defining Christianity. 3

A. In the Amplified Bible verse three reads, "Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of (produced by) the Spirit in the binding power of peace."

B. Our unity is to be based on spiritual realities and not human preferences.

C. There is:

1. One body, the body of Christ, manifesting itself in local congregations.

2. One Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ and of God.

3. One hope that all true Christians share.

4. One Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings, and Lord of lords. (to Whom we have surrendered every aspect of our lives)

5. One faith, the body of truth once for all handed down to the saints.

6. One baptism by the Spirit into Christ.

7. One God and Father of all who is over all and through all, and in all.

APPLICATION

1. All of us who have come to Christ have been given grace (gifts) that enable us to work together in love. 7-16

2. No where in the Bible can you find the idea of simply going to church; rather the emphasis is on being the church.

3. My earnest desire is for Pacolet Hills Baptist Church to be a true expression of what God designed the church to be.

4. In order for that to happen you and I need to strive to "attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." 13

5. Each one of us must fulfill God's plan and purpose for our lives as individual parts of a local body of believers.

6. Love for God, for each other, and others must be the motivation behind all we do.