

“I will build MY Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”

It's notable that the first time the Greek word for church is used in the NT Jesus puts an important pronoun before it- *MY* church.

Q: Do you have a church that you can call your church?

Acts 9:4 when Jesus appears to Paul as he's out to persecute new Christians...

“Why do you persecute ME?”

Christ's union with His Church is so close that what happens to each member may as well happen to Him.

Q: Do we have that kind of bond with the church?

A Geo-Centric model of the universe was once infallible truth to brilliant minds of ancient cultures, and as recent as 500 years ago. In this theory the Earth was at the center, and everything out there, like the rising and setting sun, circled around us.

As humans we often operate with a ME-centric model to life. To each of us, we SEEM like the center. I'm rooted in my consciousness- the rest of the universe around me is out there...

So life becomes prioritizing what orbits around us and where. And when we encounter God, we place him in orbit around us.

But God doesn't ask to be prioritized among orbits. He is the center. God doesn't fit into a compartment or concentric circle. He asks for ALL our lives.

Ephesians 1:23 (MSG)

At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.

God doesn't place us in orbit alone. He puts us in a bigger system like Earth's.

The family of faith. The Body of Christ. His Church.

God created us for more than just belief. He created us to belong.

We aren't just called to a spiritual belief where we find faith, but for physical belonging where we find fulfillment. He doesn't just call us to principles. He calls us to a people.

The shift in thought from a Geocentric model of the universe to a model where the sun was at the center was proposed by a man named Copernicus, and it had such an effect on culture that it has been called the Copernican Revolution. From religion, to politics, to art, and to science, it effected the way we considered our place in the universe.

In the 20th century the phrase “Copernican Revolution” came to be used to any supposed paradigm shift.

As shifts happen in the culture at large, they tug and pull at church culture. And the enemy often uses to context of the culture around us to subtly slide in distortions & flawed perspectives.

Cultural Context – a literary term that looks at the society the characters live in and at how their culture can affect their behavior and their opportunities. In any cultural context, deeply embedded values and attitudes can be difficult to change. A literary text often examines conflict between its characters and the context of the world or culture they inhabit.

In a similar way, our culture projects paradigms and perspectives on our Church community that can all but cripple it. Sports culture. Consumer culture. And even travel culture – our relatively new ability to travel with ease.

Tonight: *the influence of **sports culture** on church culture.*

Sporting events have played pivotal roles in communities around the world throughout history. In fact, sports in society are so vital that the United Nations (UN) has declared them a human right: “*Sport and play are human rights that must be respected and enforced worldwide.*” And thanks to Twitter, television, social media, news and alike, sports has a bigger reach than ever before. People like to talk about sports. People like to watch and listen to other people talk about sports.

Ephesians 3:10 (MSG) - *Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and **talked about***

Why aren't we seeing that kind of revival and momentum?
I believe it's because perspectives and habits with sports culture have infiltrated church culture. Chiefly - **Passive Spectating** instead of **Active Participating**.

In the Church God calls us to be active participants.
Gathering. Relating. Serving. Giving.
Your life carries deeper purpose and meaning than passive spectating.

“It's for the elite.”

High school senior football players who go on to play NCAA men's football: About one in 17, or **just under 6 percent**. Of those, the ones that go on to be drafted by an NFL team: About one in 50, or **2.0 percent**. -- High school senior players eventually drafted by an NFL team: About nine in 10,000, or **0.09 percent**.

It's not just in sports.
It's trickled into our idea of “ministry” what it is and what we have to do with it.

The church seems to have a history of raising the bar to ministry that Jesus came and lowered. When Jesus showed up, this had gone on for centuries to the point that spiritual leadership was for all but the most elite. To be a priest you needed pedigree. And to be a Pharisee you had many hoops to jump through to prove your intellect and discipline.

But Jesus took that protocol and punted it. He took the bar that had been in place and rather than raising the bar, he lowered it. It's one of many reasons the Pharisees looked down on him and his crew of disciples. In their eyes they didn't measure up.

How often does the Church make the standards for ministry higher than the standards Jesus had?

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes or powerful or wealthy when God called you. Instead, God chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful. God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important. As a result, no one can ever boast in the presence of God.

Don't get me wrong. Some folks aren't eligible for leadership because the Bible lists some pretty clear disqualifiers. But if you question whether you're qualified for ministry--- you probably are.

Part of the reason I can say that confidently is we define ministry poorly. Dare I say unbiblically. The result is that most of the church thinks:

“My position is on the sidelines.”

In the church today a “call to ministry” is beheld as a rarified call to a pulpit or platform. “Full time ministry” speaks to a higher calling than hours put in in a public workplace.

Ephesians 4:12 - *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry*

Whenever we equate ministry with a “calling” to serve Jesus in a “full time” career, the rest of the Church makes its home on the sidelines.

We're called to the frontlines.
Where's the frontlines?

The church building isn't the frontlines. The Church is more like pulling up on the sidelines as the coach takes out a white board and scribbles down the plays you're running. You've still got to go run them. They don't happen in the 4 walls of the church.

Jesus' gospel interactions = 112.
10 in the temple.
100+ outside.

Jesus was teaching us something important in this ratio.
Our holy huddles aren't where the battle is won or lost. It's on the frontlines.
Your 9-5 is the frontline.
Your neighborhood is the frontline.
Your school is the frontline.

We talked about the Copernican revolution. Look at the Communist revolution in China, juxtaposed to the church at the same time in Western Europe.

When Communists rose to power in China, all of some 6000 missionaries and trained pastors were either imprisoned or expelled. Communists aggressively sought to uproot and eliminate the church, so the church in China for all intents and purposes went off the grid. Pastors were imprisoned or tortured. House churches were made illegal. Christian education was forbidden. The expelled missionaries were forced from the frontlines and onto the sidelines. How would the church fare without them?

Meanwhile, the church in Western Europe in the same era enjoyed freedom of religion and highly trained pastors, teachers, and clergy.

This seems like a tragedy in China and the perfect setup in Western Europe, right?

What happened over the next years and decades?

The church in China exploded. The church in Western Europe dwindled.

It has been estimated by historians that the revival in China during the Communist takeover is the greatest numerical revival in history. Conservative estimates say there were 750,000 Christians in China when pastors and missionaries were expelled. In 1980 when the country opened its doors again- there were an estimated 35 million believers.

The Communist Revolution in China didn't cripple ministry and revival, it unleashed each member of the Church on the frontlines to do the work of ministry and not rely on "full time ministers." Ministry became a universal calling, not the work of a few.

Meanwhile in Western Europe, the Church at large sat back and waited for the full time ministers to do the work of ministry.

***The same way the Copernican Revolution changed our perspective of the universe,
What if a revolution caused us to recognize ministry as a universal calling?***

We have to come off the sidelines. We have to break the huddle.

But what's the play?

What's the work at hand?

Gathering

1 Thessalonians 2:8

The weekend is where the gospel is shared. (Make it your goal to attend 3 services a month)

But Monday through Friday is where our LIVES are shared.

Do both!

Reaching

The Great Commission

In a report released in the past few weeks, the Barna group found that 51 percent of church attendees in the United States were unfamiliar with the term "Great Commission." It gets worse.

It's not like the other 49% had it memorized. From there, 25% of respondents said they heard of it but did not recall its "exact meaning," 6% said they were unsure- only 17% knew for sure what it was and what it said.

We gasp and say "*wow, what a bunch of idiots.*"
We immediately drift toward self-righteousness.
"I know it, I'm a part of that top percent."

But how many of us are actively walking out this call to share the Good News? The reach the lost? To tell others about the Gospel?
At least those that don't know on the day of judgment will have an excuse. What will ours be?

"I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

We've seen the play drawn up. We have it memorized.
Will we break the huddle?

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.***
Ephesians 3:16-18

We desperately need the power of the Holy Spirit that helps us walk in righteousness.
We desperately need the work of Jesus Christ that purchased our salvation.
But we also desperately need the process of fellowship, being rooted with others in love.

Find YOUR church.
Let it equip you to do the work of ministry at YOUR frontlines.