

Rebuild



Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

Paradigm Makes a Difference

What is a paradigm, and why should we care? Let me answer that question with a story.

In the 1840's the idea that infectious bacteria could be passed on from one person to another through mere physical contact was basically suspect, and oftentimes openly ridiculed. Ignaz Semmelweis, a Viennese doctor of the period, however, could not deny what he observed when he asked doctors and nurses on his ward to wash their hands before and after examining patients. Those who washed their hands saw a drastic reduction in the fatality rate of those entrusted into their care.

Even though Dr. Semmelweis' policy of hand washing clearly resulted in the saving of lives, his peers were irritated by the constant washing, and considered him obnoxious for his insistence on the practice. In the end, they rejected both him and his recommendations. He was fired from the Allgemeines Krankenhaus hospital, and the former practice of examining patients without first cleansing hands was resumed. Their refusal resulted in the needless death of hundreds and thousands. Why? Because they rejected his paradigm.

Paradigms make a difference.

How one sees something, and the way one thinks about a matter, can have powerful implications. A medieval

paradigm that saw the world as flat instead of round limited sea travel, trade routes, and prevented the discovery of continents. Another paradigm that saw disease as a case of "bad blood" led the way for the practice of applying leeches to the ill in hopes that the sick blood would be drained. This, undoubtedly, hastened the death of many. Obviously, a wrong paradigm can not only hinder opportunity and discovery, it can destroy lives.

In America we need to review another paradigm, one more important and significant than perhaps any other - the nature and mission of Christ's Church. The Western world's view of the Church is as radically different from the New Testament vision as are the therapies of blood-letting from injections of penicillin.

Comparisons & Contrasts

The average American sees the Church as a service agency dedicated to support and encourage the Christian life, but not something *necessary* to live a Christian life. But the Church of the New Testament presents us with a different understanding. In the Early Church, it was impossible to conceive of any kind of Christian life apart from Church membership.

The Biblical vision presents us with possibilities that the American one is

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unable to offer - formation of character, Christian Community, and growth in Covenant love.

The problem is not with the Church. The problem is with our failure to understand God's intention for the Church, and our openness to settle for a lesser American paradigm. The difference between visions is vast, and cannot be bridged.

Beginning with this issue of *Rebuild*, I will contrast the Biblical model of Church alongside the American model. My purpose here is not to be critical of the contemporary Church or its many God-fearing people. But I take this approach to illustrate how stark the differences are between the two visions, and to inspire us to change our paradigm from the one this culture says constitutes a "good" Church in favor of the one Christ communicated to His disciples. If we see this distinction and then recalibrate our lives toward the Biblical ideal, God's love and power will be revealed among us in a way no American revision will ever rival.

American Model of Church	Biblical Model of Church	Biblical Truth(s)
<p>Membership: The Church is something one <i>chooses</i> based on one's individual needs, and the particular services it provides to meet those needs. It's a matter of personal preference and individual choice.</p>	<p>Membership: The Church is a Community of People whom God has called together to live out Christ's Covenant, and therefore, Church membership is inseparable from following Christ. The basis for membership is not personal preference, but <i>God's</i> call.</p>	<p>"... you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, <i>Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone</i>, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-20)."</p>

Explanation and Significance: The Church is God's, not ours. If we wish God, we must take up *residence* with Him, that is, live where *He* lives. We cannot shout from the streets and call Him out so He can go with us wherever we like. No, He calls to us *from* His Home ("God's Household," "God's dwelling") to come *into* His Home (the People of God "fitted together"). In this, *God's* household, we not only enter into a greater intimacy with Him, but with those who have likewise responded to His invitation to come in.

The Difference Between Paradigms: In the American vision of the Church, the Church is primarily a [religious] service agency. God calls out to His People from His Home, and He hears back, "But, I don't like the music, child care, people, preaching, counseling, small groups (lack of them, existence of them, kind ... whatever)." This response falsely implies that belonging to God's Church (which is primarily expressed in a "place," with *specific* people) is a matter of consumer preference. In the New Testament, one united him/herself to a Community of Christ because acceptance of Christ's Covenant *demand*ed Covenant (committed) relationship – whether the person "liked it" or not.

One paradigm leads people to ask, "What do *I* want in a church?" the other, "What does *God* want?" One *accommodates* individualism, the other calls people to *forsake* individualism by imitating the Community that exists in the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and join themselves to His People. One appeals to "taste, preference and service options" and is *consumer* based, whereas the other calls people to sacrifice, dedication, and greater love for God and is *Kingdom* based. The difference is not a matter of style, it is the difference between two entirely different worlds altogether.

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