

INTRODUCTION

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

-The second section of the preamble of the Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1776. Anyone who seriously observes "Independence Day" is ultimately led to the question: ***Is the nation today, the nation originally intended by the founding fathers?***

-***Original intentions***; is where we're at this morning. We are beginning a summer series called "***Conflicts and errors in the Bible.***" It could've been called, "***Real questions and issues, real people are raising about Biblical Christianity today.***"

If we are willing to explore the questions and issues that honestly plague people in our day, we are in for a blessing. It will force us to mature in our understanding of what we profess to believe, it will challenge us to go deeper; and it might just give us a few answers and insights that are relevant to those who are seeking right now.

That being said, the first skeptical insight is very appropriate for this weekend, because it deals with original intentions. It reads:

Christianity has been a "depot" for other cultures through the years and is far from what was originally intended.

Let me share a little fact with you. I read a surprising statistic that said 84% of Americans profess a belief in God. But only 12% trust "organized" or "institutional" religion. And a main reason is that a great many people align with this statement; churches have strayed off course. **So, is our understanding of the Bible; is our practice of Biblical Christianity, what was original intended?**

There's one way to get an honest answer; let's go back to the beginning of the Christian church. Let's start by looking at the original objective?

- **THE CHURCH'S ORIGINAL OBJECTIVE**

Here it is, straight from the mouth of the risen Christ: **Matt 28**

18. Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "***All authority*** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19. "Go therefore and ***make disciples*** of all the nations, ***baptizing*** them in the name of the ***Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit***,

20. "***teaching them to observe all things*** that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Acts 1

8. "But you shall receive ***power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you***; and you shall be witnesses to Me in ***Jerusalem***, and in ***all Judea*** and ***Samaria***, and to the ***end of the earth.***"

Let's break that down a little:

There is only One who has "all authority." Who is that? (Jesus Christ)

What does "all authority" mean? -It means that One, has the final word. That One is our example, our direction, and our top priority.

That One comes before our sports and hobbies. He is more than a duty, but our passion. We use the depths of our hearts and the heights of our minds to connect with Him. He is the first we trust and the last we doubt. And we are never ashamed. Is that where you and I are today as the church?

And in that authority, the very first thing He tells us to do is "make disciples." What exactly is a "disciple?"

Here is a dictionary definition of "disciple:"

a. One who ***embraces and assists*** in spreading the teachings of another.

b. An ***active adherent***, as of a movement or philosophy.

-So, whatever it is; you embrace it, assist, and actively stick to it.

From Gotquestions.org; here's a definition of a **Christian disciple**:

Christian discipleship is the process by which disciples grow in the Lord Jesus Christ and are equipped by the Holy Spirit, who resides in our hearts, to overcome the pressures and trials of this present life and become more and more Christlike. This process requires believers to respond to the Holy Spirit's prompting to examine their thoughts, words and actions and compare them with the Word of God.

Not only is that what we're supposed to BE; that is the church's vision **for every person who comes into our fold**. It is not the original intention of Biblical Christianity, to gather people who are merely willing to show up on a Sunday and maybe, throw a few dollars to supporting the church. It is not offering desirable consumer services for an hour or two a week. It's not about enjoying the good ol'hymns or rocking to the new ones. It's not even about getting people to say they believe in God. **The original intention of the church is to bring people to that place where Christ transforms them- from the inside, out**. No matter what else a church may do; if it is not doing that, it has fallen away from the original intention. And our skeptic has every reason to be skeptical.

Acts 1 tells us the scope of this objective is to "Jerusalem, Judea, and the ends of the earth", in other words; local, regional, and global.

The intention is to interact face to face. The original intention is to see the picture as bigger than ourselves and network with the larger church family- there are other local churches God loves just as much as us. It is the original intention to see God's concern is with all humanity; whether they speak our language, and have our skin color, or not.

That is the originally OBJECTIVE of the Biblical Church; so what's the originally DESIGN of the Church; equipped to meet that objective?

- **THE INTENDED WORKINGS OF THE CHURCH**

The original design has a division of labor and leadership-

Acts 6

1. Now in those days, when the **number of the disciples was multiplying**, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.
2. Then **the twelve** summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "**It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.**"
3. "Therefore, brethren, **seek out from among you seven men of good reputation**, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;
4. "but we will **give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**"
5. And the saying pleased the whole multitude. ...
6. whom they **set before the apostles**; and when they had prayed, they **laid hands on them.**

Make note of the opening statement: When things were run as God designed, the church succeeds at its objective- i.e. multiplying disciples.

So what's the design? There were those dedicated to the responsibilities of Godly discernment, coordinating the church body, and strategizing. The apostles also referred to themselves as elders, so we can consider them, the role model for church leadership.

They weren't being snobby when they didn't serve tables. What they were saying is; in order to keep the church on track- they couldn't meet the responsibilities of leadership, and do all the hands-on stuff as well.

We live in a culture of consumers, and that also means spiritual consumers. People expect more services for less effort. Long gone are the days of tight communities and simple church life. Today people expect youth pastors, worship leaders, technical staff and a myriad of programs.

The new currency of our day revolves more around time than money. Hire professional church staff- have them preach, teach, take care of our kids, visit, council, and program; just don't ask for our time. But, even if a church can afford the staff; is that the way it's supposed to be?

Let's take a look at the original intention for the average church member:

Ro 12

4. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members **do not have the same function**,
5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.
6. Having then **gifts differing** according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;
7. or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in **teaching**;
8. he who **exhorts**, in exhortation; he who **gives**, with liberality; he who **leads**, with diligence; he who shows **mercy**, with cheerfulness.
9. Let **love be without hypocrisy**. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.
10. Be **kindly affectionate to one another** with brotherly love, **in honor** giving preference to one another;
11. **not lagging in diligence**, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

-One body- EVERYONE with gifts and capacities. That means EVERYONE is responsible for some ongoing part; from encouragement to preaching.

The place of leadership is to equip and open opportunities for others to serve in their gift areas. As a pastor, let me share four quick insights:

1. If I make a routine out of doing your job- I am failing as a pastor. We will not be blessed.
2. If you become part of a fellowship, but do not actively work in your ministry- you are a failure as a Christian. You are throwing away your blessing.
3. If you are doing everything- you are out of balance; and you are turning your blessing into a burning.
4. In God's economy, no one gets without giving.

Here is the original intention:

Deut 6

6. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart;
7. "you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

It is not a professional staff's job to teach your children, that is your job. It is the pastor's job to teach you so you can teach your children.

1 Thess 5

11. Therefore **comfort each other and edify one another**, just as you also are doing.
12. And we urge you, brethren, to **recognize those who labor among you**, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

If it's a church's mindset to have the pastoral staff or even the elders do all the visiting- they have strayed from the original Biblical intention. The original design is to have everyone comfort and edify each other.

Acts 2

46. And they, **continuing daily with one accord in the temple**, and **breaking bread from house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,
47. **Praising God, and having favour with all the people**. And **the Lord added** to the church daily such as should be saved.

And when the original intentions are followed, that is what happens.

CONCLUSION

But that leads us to a question. What if we place familiar tradition over original intention? That's still being "church" as we know it, so won't that work just as well?

Let me show you a picture... (polar bear on ice)

At first this looks funny. But in fact, it's heart-wrenching. It illustrates the phenomena of global warming, and the ice caps are melting.

The tried and true routine of the bears was to travel from sheet of ice to sheet of ice as they fish the waters. An increasing number of bears are being found drowned. They get caught far out on a sheet of ice, isolated. Eventually that sheet melts from under them. They have no choice but to sink or swim. Even though polar bears are very good swimmers, there is simply no other ice, which to swim.

In a changing environment, by simply being out of step with the present reality; they have signed their own death warrant.

Here's the thing folks: Global warming isn't just a physical phenomena, it is a cultural and spiritual one as well. Values and views that have been held for a long time are quickly melting away. Concepts of reverence and authority are quickly melting away. The things that resonated in previous generations is quickly melting away.

The Gospel truths never change. The original intentions of God for His church never change. —But the social rules, the previous attractions, and the cultural Christianity that the church trusted as solid ground; is quickly melting. And if the present church doesn't find a new way to go fishing, we will find ourselves going the way of the polar bear.

And what is that new way? I can tell you this much: it is learning the difference between the **original intentions and mere tradition**. It involves **God changing us from the inside out** and refusing to settle for anything else. It involves a mindset where **everybody is meant to minister to everybody**, and **leadership is the equipper**, not the "hired servant." It involves people buying into **the promise you are given Holy gifts** and are meant to use them. It involves us going **into the world**... in fact, to the ends of the earth.

So is our skeptic right? **Is our Christianity merely a cultural depot, or are we an active part of the original intention?** I believe that over the next year, we'll see what we are; what you are, by the one acid test Jesus shared, "By their fruits you shall know them."