

Modern House Church Movement

by Chuck Missler

Chuck Missler explores the historical evolution and modern relevance of house churches within the Christian faith.

Duration: 9:50

Scripture: Matthew 18:20, Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:24

Topics: "Church Growth", "Discipleship Models"

Description

This sermon delves into the historical progression of church practices and traditions, highlighting the evolution of rituals, doctrines, and power dynamics within Christianity over the centuries. It discusses the Wesley Revival's structured approach to discipleship and growth, contrasting it with the traditional congregational church model. The sermon also explores the life cycle of congregational churches, warning against the dangers of accumulating excessive assets and power-oriented leadership. It concludes by examining a modern example of a church emphasizing small group dynamics for growth, accountability, and personal transformation.

Transcript

In 220, Origen introduced infant baptism, Constantine for his own purposes adopted Christianity when he took over, the Edict of Toleration endorsed religion as being legal, house churches in 380 were outlawed, and that continues to be the pattern even in the Protestant Reformation. Luther and Calvin tried to wipe out the house churches, loss of control in their mind. 431, the Council of Ephesus, Mary was then instituted, Mary worshipped as the mother of God and all that, and as a state church, you see all this starts to get enforced, Leo the Great of course became the so-called Bishop of Rome, Valentinian confirmed as the spiritual leader of the Western Empire, this is just a recount of what we talked about last time, and then they started adopting a common priestly code, about 500, Justinian, the state ordained church, the state not only permits it, it now ordains it, and you have the first Pope title goes to several different claimants, kissing the Pope's foot begins in 709, worship of images and relics develops in the 8th century, use of holy water begins in 850, the canonization of dead saints in 995, just before the Mayan ends, fasting on Fridays before Lent was introduced in 998, celibacy of the priesthood was instituted in 1070, the hidden agenda there is to keep priests from having an estate to have all property belonging to the church, so if they're celibate they don't have an estate, they may have illegitimate sons that doesn't encumber the assets, prayer beads adopted from paganism in 1090, the inquisition begins against the Jews and witches and what have you in 1184 and on, 1254 they officially established the sale of indulgences and so on, that's

several, that's three centuries before Luther by the way, 1215 transubstantiation of water and wine, 1229 the reading of the Bible forbidden to laymen in 1229 and on, 1414 the communion cup forbidden to laypeople, 1439 the doctrine of purgatory was decreed, that's not biblical obviously, 1492 the Jews were outlawed in Spain in 1492, that's why Columbus had to split before midnight with his crew, 1545 the tradition granted equal authority with the Bible, that's where it starts to get shredded, even in Judaism today, the whole Kabbalah really repudiates and goes contrary to the Torah upon theoretically it's based, because they start mixing it with traditions and as we say in the computer business, you torture the data long enough it'll confess to anything, and of course that brings you to 1517, Luther's 95 Theses, actually the winds of Reformation started a couple centuries earlier, but it was one of these crystallizing events which led to Zwingli and Melancthon and Calvin, John Knox and others.

We have the reversions then to traditional forms of worship get persecuted, the Anabaptists get slaughtered and so forth, even Luther has statements like all lay pastors teaching publicly are to be killed, these are pronouncements of Luther and Calvin and the like, they have their own power problems, and Springfield was outlawed, disciples jailed and so forth, in 1600 we had 40 translations from the Latin Bible, that's putting the Bible in the people's hands so they can go to the real authority, 1700 of the Huguenots murdered, one of the leaders executed before 10,000 witnesses, so in the 4th century we had it canonized by the state, independent fellowships are, you know, outlawed and persecuted, then we have the Reformation, they did a marvelous job on soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, but the other traditions are ignored, namely eschatology and so on, and even the Protestant leadership continues to persecute deviant groups adhering to biblical doctrines, and that's a shock to many, and I know it was to Dave Hunt when he researched his book, *What Love Is This?*, and how Calvinism misrepresents the character of God, and it's a very controversial book that I encourage you to take a look at and evaluate yourself, but we go through more of these, there's a whole bunch of these deviant groups, we won't go through all of that. The Wesley Revival is interesting to notice, everybody knows about the Wesley Revival, many people don't realize what it constituted. They involved directed growth and discipleship, not just coming down the sawdust trail.

Their groups were called bands, you started with a trial band, which emphasized prevenient grace, that is grace that precedes your commitment, and this was for provisional seekers, if you will. Four to six people met a week ... went weekly with a leader for a couple of months, and when you outgrew that, you were allowed to go to a ... what's called a class meeting, which was convincing grace, that dealt with the mind. You were a member of the society then, twelve to thirty-six people, you'd attend that for about two years before you went to a band meeting, converting grace, and in that kind of groups you'd divide into forty-eight people, all bored again by now, and then a select band where it's spirit-filled.

So the point is they had these different groups, but they had it highly organized, how you earned your way from one to the next, if you will. In 1768, after thirty years, they had forty so-called circuits, twenty-seven thousand members, by 1800, one of thirty Englishmen were a member of the Westley Revival. But again, it was the dynamics of a small group, now I'm not saying this is the right way to do it, that's the way they did it, when they died, it all fell apart.

We have alternatives today, the megachurch is a popular one, many people are familiar with that. There's also a place for a local congregational church in the more typical model, and then we also have small study groups. Some of these are cells at homes that are organized or supervised by the local church.

Very healthy, very appropriate way to do things. Some of the home fellowships are independent, because they're not encouraged, or in some cases discouraged, by the local churches. And then we have actually not only home fellowships, but home churches, a slight difference there.

The whole congregational church idea, you have a building, first of all, we call a cathedral or a church. You have a special day, typically it's Sunday, not Shabbat. It's a professional leadership, a priest, clergyman, or a hireling that leads it all, and then you have a special service performed for the people, with ceremonies, interpretations, and motivational speeches, and it has a way to maintain itself, with tithes and offerings.

That's the basic model of the typical, nominal, stereotype congregational church. There is a life cycle for such churches, and they surprise you, everything has a life cycle. Nations have life cycles as well as people.

You start with a people-oriented pastor, he draws a crowd. He pretty soon becomes pulpit-oriented, man, I've got a pretty good crowd. Then as that grows, he becomes property-oriented, maybe we need a bigger cathedral.

And that ... remember Gideon, you know, Gideon had this incredible victory. They wanted to make him king. He said, I won't take your king, I'll take your money, though, and he went ... he went instead to build his estate.

So when he died, his seventy sons get murdered by his bastard son. There is a danger in accumulating too many assets, as some churches are finding out today. And that leads, of course, to a power-oriented pastorate.

You have the return of the Nicolaitans, if you will, and that leads to politically driven decay. That tragically is a cycle that one can visualize in some places. And the issue, of course, is accountability and management by hearsay and all these other evils that ... and they argue that Matthew 18 wasn't for us, that was for the layman.

Politics always emerge when there's no objective function. If you're an infantry squad, or if you're in a sales organization where you have numbers every week what you've done, or if there's an objective function for the organization, then it tends to be performance-oriented. But where that's lacking, as is the case in schools, hospitals, and churches, how do you measure whether it's a good or bad job? It's a qualitative judgment.

And that's when politics takes reign. Let's take an example of one modern example. It's not the one to follow necessarily, it's just an interesting one to study, called the Rock Church in San Diego.

Everyone in Sunday church has to be in a small group of six to twelve. Once there's more than twelve, they force them to split. These small groups meet weekly under a facilitator.

He's not a teacher, he just directs the discussion. They meet together, pray together, discuss the notes that were emailed to them from the Sunday sermon. They hold themselves accountable, and when they pray for their friends' children, they know their names.

And when it goes beyond twelve, it is forced to split in two. In two years, this church has grown to over four thousand. I think it's about eight thousand now.

This was written a few ... some months ago. So that's one example. What's interesting is most, I think, that the average age is under twenty-five in the church, young people.

They're excited about it. If there's a meeting and they're five minutes late, they're out. They're serious.

They take themselves seriously. And the kids love that. They eat it up.

It's astonishing. See, these small groups have some advantages that the structural denominational churches don't have. They have a discipline in multiplication.

It's called mitosis. Cells divide. Soon you have twice as many, then you have four times as many.

There's an intrinsic multiplication that takes place. They're free of growth barriers. There isn't a leadership problem.

All you need is facilitators. Because there's plenty of materials around, if someone could just lead the discussion about them. The participants are involved.

In fact, the facilitator's primary job is to make sure everybody participates in the discussion. There's personal transformation, evident, and thus accountability among the group. This is more effective for new Christians because they're in an environment where they can ask dumb questions.

And it also solves the leadership crisis. It's more biblical than any of the models that we generally see on the horizon. It's also persecution-proof structure.

If everybody's meeting in small homes across the landscape, how are you going to get your hands on that one? A lot tougher. A lot tougher. It's also more efficient.

There's no cost, fundamentally. Interesting. The true church is a supernatural invention.

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