

Building a True Church Culture: Christ at the Center

The church is not just a good idea or a man's idea—it's God's plan for shining His light in the world. God places "lampstands" (churches) everywhere because He wants His light to shine. Colorado needs more lampstands, and God works in all seasons, even when we don't like the season we're in.

Working On Us While Working Through Us

There's an important truth many Christians miss: while God works on you, He can also work through you. Some have been taught that until God perfects you, He can't use you—but that's not biblical. God is committed to both:

- Making us more like Jesus (working on us)
- Using us for His purposes (working through us)

Don't wait until you're perfect to serve God. He'll never short-circuit the maturing process, but He won't wait until you're flawless to use you either.

What Is the True Church?

In 1 Peter 1:23-2:9, we see a description of the true church:

- Born again, spiritually transformed, and set apart for God's purpose
- Built on the imperishable Word of God
- Called to rid ourselves of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander
- Like living stones being built into a spiritual house
- A chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation
- A people belonging to God who declare His praises

The true church can never fail because it's built on Jesus Christ. We don't belong to each other or to a particular church—we belong to Him.

Church vs. Chapel: What's the Difference?

Martin Luther said, "Wherever God builds a church, the devil builds a chapel." The devil isn't always opposing the church—sometimes he's joining it, creating imitations that distort God's intentions.

The devil can do more damage from within than through opposition from without. He works through distortion and imitation rather than outright opposition. We must ensure we're building Christ's church, not a chapel of our own making.

Six Essential Church Cultures to Cultivate

Culture isn't innate or natural—it's learned and transferred through generations via imitation and observation. If we're not intentional about creating godly culture, worldly culture will fill the void.

1. A Culture of Christ

The church is not about people—it's a people who are about Jesus. Many have been raised in church but never raised in Christ. Everything we do must glorify Christ.

People lose their way when they lose their "why," and we lose our "why" when we lose our wonder. Jesus is the way, the why, and the wonder.

Today's church is often more battle-focused than bride-focused. While spiritual warfare is real, we're known more for what we're against than for our intimacy with Jesus. Remember, the Bible ends with a wedding, not just a war.

2. A Culture of Conviction

The church today is often "over-politicized and under-gospelized." We need to maintain biblical conviction without mixture. To a church without mixture, God will pour out His Spirit without measure.

We need both Word and Spirit:

- The Word without the Spirit is powerless
- The Spirit without the Word is weaponless

The greatest threat to God's Word isn't those who directly oppose it, but those who claim to believe it while remaining ignorant of what it says. Similarly, our self-sufficient church culture can be a greater hindrance to the gospel than the self-indulgent culture outside.

3. A Culture of Community

God puts the lonely in families. The church isn't just friends—it's family. You don't get to choose your family, and family helps you grow up in ways friends can't.

God often puts people who don't seem to belong together in the same church family. Isaiah 41 describes how God puts trees and plants that don't naturally belong together in the desert—so people may see and understand it was the Lord's doing.

Our relationships with each other are the basis the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful. Francis Schaeffer called Christian community "the last apologetic"—the final proof to the world that what we say about Jesus is true.

4. A Culture of Calling

We count success, but God weighs it. He's not interested in numbers but in how much of Jesus is in who we are and what we do.

Our goal should be to grow up and mature, not just to grow bigger. Ministry should result in maturity and multiplication—growing up and growing out. The priesthood of all believers means everyone ministers, not just the leaders.

5. A Culture of Caring

You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving. The Great Commandment is first to love God with everything, then to love your neighbor. Without loving God first, you can't truly love others.

Generosity should be the overflowing fruit of following Jesus. We're called to be fountains, not drains. God doesn't oppose wealth, but He commands generosity.

Like the Sea of Galilee versus the Dead Sea, the difference between life and death isn't the source but what we do with what we receive. The Dead Sea has no outlet, while the Sea of Galilee gives what it receives.

6. A Culture of Commission

We won't impact the world by faithfully going to church, but by faithfully being the church when we go into the world. Jesus didn't command the world to go to church—He commanded the church to go to the world.

The church isn't a waiting room for heaven. We're empowered to be ready for Christ's return while preparing the world for His return. Mission isn't just a function of the church—the church exists for mission.

Life Application

This week, examine which of these six cultures needs strengthening in your life:

1. Evaluate your focus: Is Jesus truly at the center of everything you do, or have other priorities taken His place? How much of your day is spent pursuing Him versus pursuing other things?
2. Check your convictions: Are you standing firm on God's Word and being led by His Spirit? Where have you compromised biblical truth for cultural acceptance?
3. Invest in community: How are you contributing to your church family? Are you working through conflicts or avoiding them? Remember, the level of our "offendability" often reveals our level of immaturity.
4. Pursue your calling: What gifts has God given you that you're not using? How can you grow in maturity this week, not just in knowledge?
5. Practice generosity: In what ways can you be more generous with your time, talents, and treasures? Is there something God is asking you to give that you're holding onto?
6. Embrace the mission: Who in your life needs to hear about Jesus? How can you be the church outside the church building this week?

Remember, the church wasn't birthed out of a good idea—it was God's idea. Is your life reflecting the true church Jesus is building, or have you settled for a chapel of your own making?