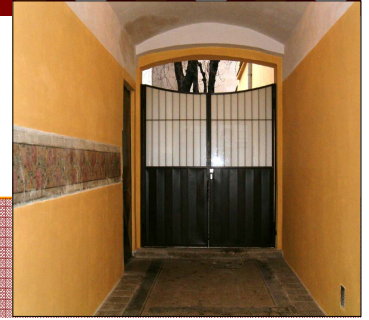


SERVANT LEADERS

Comfy Cozy Church

by Sara Tusek



“... The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence.” Ephesians 1:20

The Christian Church in the U. S. has many admirable qualities. Perhaps the one most prized by those congregations (individual churches) that have it, is friendliness to strangers. Congregations that are friendly often speak of themselves as a family and have numerous processes in place (some formal, some informal) to quickly bring strangers into the family. The verse quoted above seems to confirm that congregations should be internally unified, as they, acting collectively, are the body of Christ; He reaches the fallen, sinful world through this collective body.

But humans, with their waywardness, can (and often do) take something that's good and turn it into something not-so-good. The congregation that has as its primary goal to cultivate friendliness and engender a family-like atmosphere runs the risk of turning inward. Instead of evangelizing, the congregation focuses on its own needs. It fails in its most basic task—to reach the world for Christ.

Family or a Sword?

Jesus said, “And now I'm going to tell you who you are, really are. You are Peter, a rock. This is the rock on which I will put together my church, a church so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell will be able to keep it out.” Matthew 16:17

Jesus is quite clear in this verse. He is giving His disciple Peter a new identity; no longer a fisherman, with human needs and fears, Peter is now the rock on which Jesus will build His church.

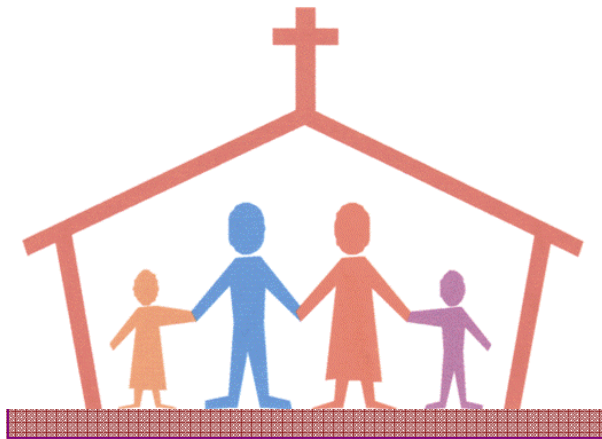
This is a serious assignment. Peter has to leave behind whatever he cared about before, so that he can take on a new, enormous task—to act as the foundation for the Church that Jesus will build on earth, the Church that will be His body. Peter may even have to give up his relationships with those whom he loves, if that love distracts him from his God-given assignment. Jesus said,

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For

I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.” Matthew 10:34-36

These verses are not exactly what the family-friendly congregation wants to hear. The comfy, cozy approach to “church” doesn't match these words of Jesus. It seems that Jesus is making sure that His followers understand at the outset that their commitment to His kingdom must be the most important commitment in their lives. The family-like congregation with its primary emphasis on activities that educate, entertain and embrace its members in a warm cocoon is on the wrong track, according to Jesus.

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Comfy Cozy Church

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Modern Pharisees

"Instead of giving you God's Law as food and drink by which you can banquet on God, they package it in bundles of rules, loading you down like pack animals . . . They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, basking in the most prominent positions, preening in the radiance of public flattery, receiving honorary degrees, and getting called Doctor and Reverend." Matthew 23:4

Ouch! That hurts! This cutting verse was aimed at the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus' time who had their priorities messed up. Most Christian leaders don't see themselves as Pharisees, and in fact feel rather smug when they consider how much better they are than the bad old religious leaders whom Jesus criticizes.

But . . . Where are these fakes found? At the head table at church dinners, where they are honored by those whom they "lead." They are hardly the type of leader that Jesus modeled, the *servant leader* who keeps out of the limelight and is most fulfilled when serving others.

These Pharisees look like some modern-day Christian congregational leaders, with their cozy, comfy church dinners and family-friendly whirlwinds of specialized activities aimed at niche market segments (moms, teenagers and pre-teens, singles, older adults, and so on).

Of course not all family-oriented churches are led by egotistical pastors who love to be glorified at church dinners. But if even one church falls into this trap, the witness of Christ is stained in the eyes of the world.

The real problem with comfy cozy

" . . . The church is Christ's body, in which He speaks and acts, by which He fills everything with His presence." Ephesians 1:20

The verse that introduced this newsletter is the heart of the reason why a comfy cozy congregation is dangerous.

The Church (the body of Christ, composed of all committed Christians) has enormous power along with terrifying responsibilities. The power is that of God. The responsibility is that of man.

Christians are, in a way, like rock stars.



They are visible to the world due to their charisma and their confidence. Wherever a Christian goes, he or she has an impact, as the Christian is the living embodiment of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives power to Christians.

" . . . and yet you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth." Acts 1:8

But the responsibility to use this power correctly, to advance God's kingdom, rests on the shoulders of each Christian. Using this power wrongly, or not at all, is a grievous sin, according to Ephesians 4:30.

The point is not that there's anything so wrong about the warm and friendly church. It's that the pursuit of comfy coziness can take the place of the pursuit of the kingdom of God. Being comfortable, feeling accepted, accepting love—all these are wonderful experiences for most people, and congregations that succeed in being warm and welcoming will probably flourish.

But are these congregations turned so much inward that they have little effect on the community around them? Are they using their God-given power responsibly, to bring the lost to Christ? That's the sobering question that the comfy cozy church needs to answer, or it will become irrelevant to God.