

Whose Responsibility Am I?

Recently, a friend was sharing with me about his church. He was lamenting the fact that - in his opinion - his pastor wasn't going deep enough, biblically, in his Sunday Sermons. This was leading my friend to question whether or not he was in the wrong church. Should he find another? Would he be better "fed" in another? Should he leave his church and go on a quest to find the church with the best preacher? I thought and prayed about whether or not to respond, and then, if so, how so; for the issue speaks to much larger issues and much bigger questions.

Let me digress for a moment and make a cultural observation. We have transitioned, perhaps irreversibly, to an environment in which people are no longer required to care for themselves. We have to a very large degree, moved down the road toward that place where we as citizens have agreed that the state is responsible for seeing to all our needs; be they physical, emotional, educational, medical, fiscal, etc. The problem with that "mindset" is that it is insidiously pervasive and dangerous.

Given what human nature is - fallen and depraved in its will, intellect and emotions - the sense and feeling that our well-being is someone else's responsibility can become all too "comfy", all too quickly. When we apply the adoption of that mindset to our spiritual lives... especially when we have church institutions working diligently at becoming all things to all people... it is very tempting to view the church as the entity responsible for our spiritual well-being. Hmm... I can't help but wonder how that makes God the Holy Spirit feel.

When Jesus was about to go off the scene, He told His men that it was actually a good thing that He was going (John 16:7), because if He didn't go, the Comforter (God the Holy Spirit) wouldn't come. Jesus had already told them what the Comforter's role would be, once He (Jesus) was off the scene; He (the Comforter, the Helper, the Holy Spirit) would...

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and will remind you of all things which I said to you" (John 14:26 NKJV).

I guess the question is, "To what degree have we, as individuals who claim to have God the Comforter in our hearts, abdicated that position of being taught and reminded? To what degree have we as individuals relinquished that responsibility to our churches?"

Let's not get too political about this, but especially in the "Nanny State" environment in which many of us find ourselves, how much of your personal well-being do you still consider your own responsibility, and how much are you satisfied to give that responsibility to someone else?

My soul's well being is between me and God. Yes, my pastor's job is to help me with that, but it is always and only my responsibility to "work out [your] my own salvation" (Phil 2:12 NKJV). That doesn't mean that it's my job to work for my salvation, but once I have salvation, it's my job to work it out. Not only that, but the rest of the verse says that I am to do so "with fear and trembling". In other words, this responsibility is a grave one. How is it that we so easily relinquish it to another?

Going down the road of my friend's line of thinking... how do any churches without great preachers even keep the doors open? How do "great" preachers reach those who might not be able to keep up with their preaching? What of those medical pros who, say, can't go to church on Sunday morning at all? What of those who work in the nursery and don't hear the message but once or twice a month? What about those who get saved in a culture where there isn't a church on every corner like there is around here, or even a church within any reasonable commute distance? Hmm...

I'll share with you what I sent to my friend. I consider it good advice.

You can, and should continue the fellowship at church and enjoy it. But going deeper is something that you are ultimately responsible for, yourself. If you need to augment what you get in church, then do so. No church will be able to give you all that you need. Some people will find that in a church, but your mind, inquisitiveness and perception will require you to do more. Your spiritual growth is up to you. A good church and a pastor will help, but it's up to you.

Pastor