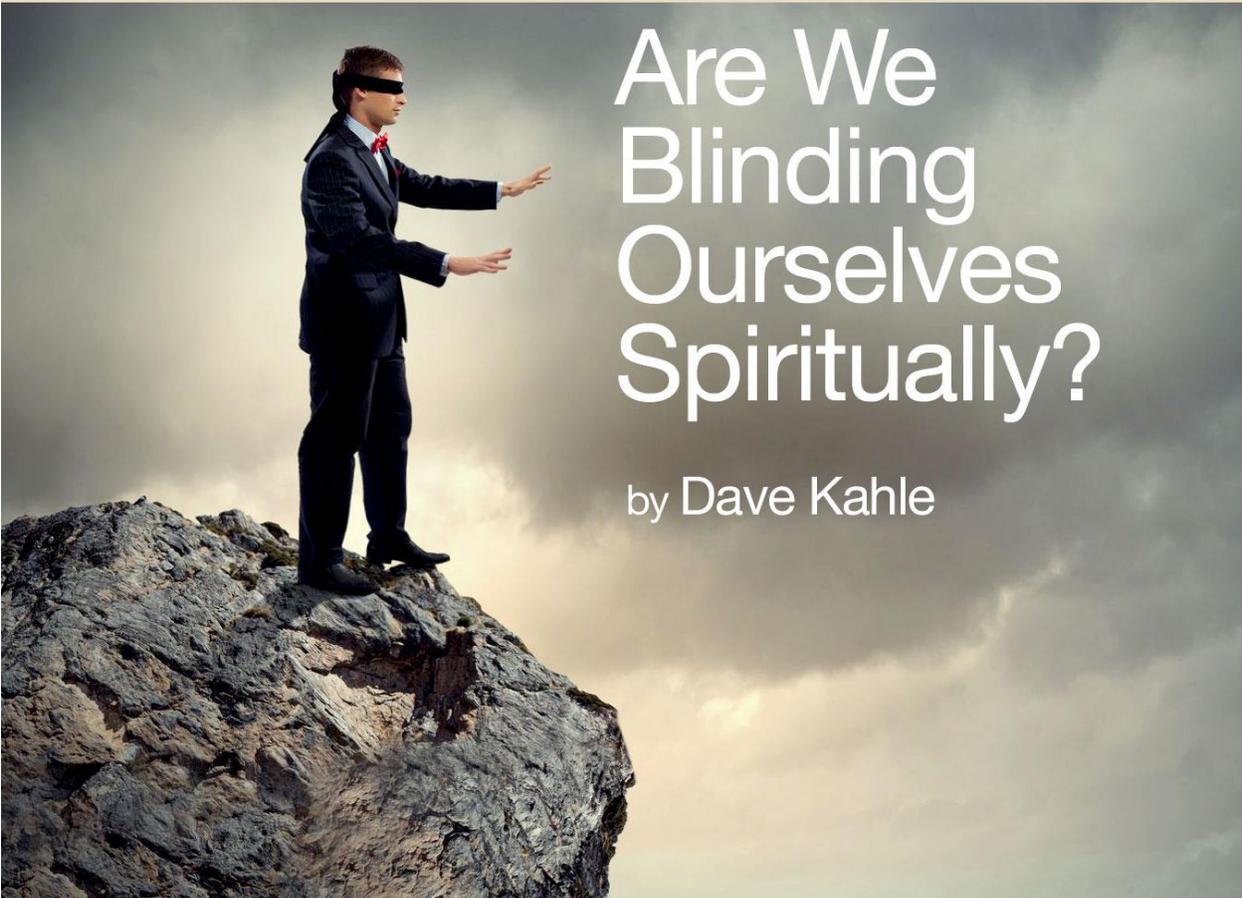


Cataract Beliefs



Are We
Blinding
Ourselves
Spiritually?

by Dave Kahle

Cataract Beliefs: Are we blinding ourselves spiritually?

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Chapter One: What's a cataract belief?



I think we all understand that culture – those things that we are taught to believe as we grow up and that are subsequently practiced by those around us – is an immensely powerful force in shaping the quality and tenor of people's lives.

We can look at people groups scattered around the world and marvel at the things that some believe. We can see how their lives are shaped for both good as well as evil by their belief systems. Whole countries exist in which citizens' lives are shaped by the power of false religious beliefs. *National Geographic* regularly brings us views of people whose lives are controlled by the dictates of the culture in which they are raised. Culture – the combination of beliefs, values, and practices that are taught and supported by the community – is one of the most powerful and pervasive forces in our lives.

Yet, while we can look at others and see some of the false beliefs in their lives, it's very difficult to see them in our own. Since we, too, are raised to accept certain

beliefs, these beliefs gradually embed themselves into the core of our minds, dictating the quality of our lives, while we often remain blissfully unaware of their impact.

That is exactly the case we find ourselves in today. There are certain culturally supported beliefs that are widespread throughout the modern institutional church system. It doesn't matter what the particular flavor of the church is, its denominational affiliation, or its position on the charismatic/Pentecostal/conservative spectrum. It doesn't matter if it's in the USA or any other Westernized country. Regardless of these differences, almost every congregation holds these beliefs and adheres to these practices.

Not only are these practices pervasive, they're also so deeply held that virtually no one questions them. Created and supported by the culture, they have achieved the status of unquestioned "truth." To not adhere to them makes your Christianity suspect. Go into any institutional church anywhere in the Western world or one of the clones created by the western missionary effort, try advocating a position contrary to these beliefs, and you'll be helped to leave immediately. They are so fundamental that few churches can stand to have them violated. They are the practical foundations of the modern institutional church system.

But, are they right? Are they scriptural? Are they part of God's plan for His church? Or, are they culturally induced beliefs and practices that have developed out of man's thoughts and are contrary to God's expressed directions? I call them 'Cataract



beliefs." Like a cataract that grows in our eye, these beliefs slowly narrow our perspectives, causing us to see reality in a distorted way, until they eventually blind us totally. Few people question them.

When we hear the word "belief" we commonly jump to ideas about big picture concepts. Do we believe in God, for example, or are we atheists and don't believe? But our beliefs can be much smaller than that, and just as adroitly shape our attitudes and actions. For

example, we can believe the next door neighbor is a bit nutty, and so we avoid him so as not to subject ourselves to an uncomfortable conversation. The next door neighbor being nutty is a belief, and it, in some small way, dictates and influences some of our actions – we avoid him.

The cataract beliefs that most of us have come to believe, like a cataract in our eye, cloud our perspectives, hinder our ability to see things clearly, and limit our contribution to the Kingdom. And, like a cataract, they come on us slowly and inevitably. We rarely know that they are growing over us, and are often totally oblivious to their existence and their impact on our lives and spiritual growth. They obscure reality. As long as we hold onto them, we'll be hindered because our view of reality will be distorted.

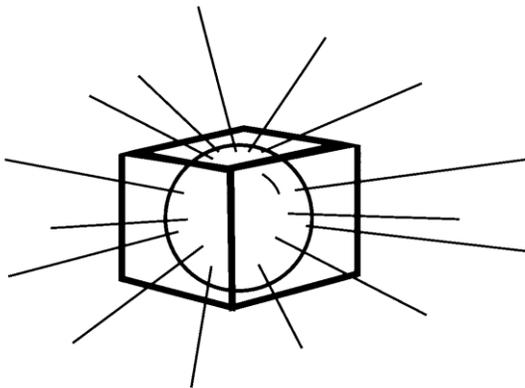
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Why is it that we are told in scripture that we have the Holy Spirit, and that we have the ability to move mountains and do greater things than Christ did, and yet we see almost no evidence of it?

*"Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will **move**. Nothing will be impossible for you."* (Matthew 17:20)

*"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even **greater things** than these, because I am going to the Father. (John*

14:12) Why is there such a gap between what scripture tells us, and what we see in the Christian community around us?



Could it be that the power that was promised us, the power of the Holy Spirit, is somehow being hindered? Some years ago, I was given this image to explain it.

Imagine a box frame, with the sides open. Inside it is a powerful light that fills up the box and illuminates everything around it. Now, imagine the box to be you and me, and the light to be the Holy Spirit – incredibly powerful, illuminating our worlds just like Christ promised us. Now, take a screen, like

we have on doors and windows to keep the insects out and nail it to the frame to cover one of the openings. What would be the impact?

That section of the light would be slightly hindered, decreasing the power of the light ever so slightly. Now, nail layer upon layer of screens on the top of one other, covering all the openings. Eventually, the layers of screen would totally shut off the light. It would still be there, just as bright as ever, but's power to illuminate our world would be dramatically hindered by the screen we put in place.

The screens that hinder the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives are the cataract beliefs that our Christian culture promotes to us. They are the false beliefs and paradigms that we come to believe at such a deep level that we rarely are even aware of them. Each one, by itself, hinders only a small portion of the light within us. Combined, they block out the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the intention of this work to expose some of the most pernicious paradigms and false beliefs. And, by so doing, encourage many of us to pry that off, and allow the power of the Holy Spirit to shine through.

One more thought....

Before I examine several of them, let's consider one more concept. Throughout history, there has often been a conflict between practices that seemed good to mankind, and those practices that were given by God. Typically God has instituted some practice among men, but mankind has decided to change things to some other order because it seemed good to them.

One example is the cry of the Israelite people for a king. The story is told in I Samuel, chapter 8. God had ordained the system of judges and prophets to organize and administer His nation. But the Israelites looked around them at neighboring nations, and saw that they had kings. They, too, wanted a king. It seemed good to them. Having a king seemed like a good thing. A king could unify the people, bring organization to their country, be a rallying point for the people, lead them in battle, and make them just like the other nations around them. All good reasons to want a king. All reasonable, valid things.

But God had a better practice. A simpler, more direct way of organizing His people that kept Him in the forefront -- no king standing in the middle between God and His people.

However, He eventually gave them what they asked for. He said to Samuel, *“It is not you they have rejected as their king, it is me.”* (1 Samuel 8:7). Saul was then appointed the first of a line of Israelite kings. And, some good came out of that. The Israelites defeated their enemies in battle, power was consolidated around the king, and eventually, under Solomon, the Israelite nation achieved great prosperity and influence. These were all good things from man’s perspective.

However, the net result was devastating. The Israelite people lost their reliance on prophets and judges and thus moved further from God. Their focus often strayed from the things of God to the political maneuvering of the royalty. Power struggles and moral corruption became commonplace. The kings led the Israelites into idolatry on numerous occasions. And the institution of the rule of kings led to the division of the Israelite people into two kingdoms, and the eventual loss of the ten tribes.



How much better would their lives have been if they had only stuck to God’s simple plan and practices for them, rather than following their own ideas of what was good?

This conflict between God’s simple practices and man’s “improved” vision of what is good is a theme that crops up continually in the Bible. It began with Adam and Eve, and continued throughout the Bible. It was, in part, what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for, and certainly added to the motivation of those who crucified Him. Even in the last book of the Bible, Revelation, Jesus condemns the Nicolaitians for following

practices that they consider to be good instead of God's simple practices that are best for His church.

This constant conflict between God's simple practices for His people and our ever-evolving image of what is good is one of the basic themes of the Bible.

You can probably tell where I'm leading. It's my view that these culturally-supported, unquestioned "cataract" practices and beliefs of the modern church fall into this same category. Rather than following God's simple plan and practices for His people, church leaders have instead developed practices which they see as "good." These beliefs and practices have become the culture at our churches. And this "good" crowds out and substitutes for God's best with devastating consequences.

What are these practices? These unquestioned myths that seem good to us but that deviate from God's best? These culturally-supported practices? I'll share the first in the next chapter.

Chapter Two:

Cataract Belief #1: *Christianity is about going to church and worshipping God. Business is about making money.*

Not only is this belief a distortion of reality, it is exactly the opposite of reality. The truth is: *“Business – and work -- is about engaging with and worshipping God. What you do in the institutional church is irrelevant to your relationship with God.”*

Let’s unpack this.

In the very beginning, when God made man, he made him to work, and to work with him. Look at Genesis 1:

“²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

The first words God spoke to man were to give him a charge – a mission: Subdue the earth. Rule over it. Sounds like work to me. Later, he shows us exactly what he meant, at least in part. In Geneses 2:

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.



Notice that the very first time we see God interacting with man, it was in the context of work. They worked together! God gave Adam the charge to name the animals, and then God brought the animals to him. Adam would then name them. Teamwork!



Notice, also, that in the very first glimpse we get of God, in Genesis, he is working. God is a worker, and he made man in his image – to be a worker, as he is. And God’s relationship with man began in the context of work. In this passage, God sets the pattern of interacting with man primarily through work. Work is at the essence of our humanity, and at the heart of our God-likeness. It is the place where God interacts with his creation – not in the artificial environment of a church building, but rather in nitty-gritty environment of real work.

As the biblical story unfolds, we see man’s working efforts becoming more sophisticated. As mankind begins to become more numerous, they form households – the Bible word for family businesses. And God, true to the pattern established in the Garden of Eden, works with these businesses and relates to them.

One of the first major characters in the Bible story is Abraham, a wealthy businessman. Abraham’s business probably had thousands of employees.

“When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.” (Genesis 14:14)

If he were able to organize 318 trained men who had been born in his household, how many untrained men were there? How many younger brothers, sisters, older

siblings, and parents? It's not hard to imagine his business comprising a thousand or more people.

Have you ever considered how Abram came to have such faith in God? There was no scripture, no priests, no pastors, no church buildings, and no “worship services.” Could it be that in the day-to-day trials of building a business that employed thousands that Abram came to know God? How else would he have done it?

One test of Abram's faith occurred when God told him to move his business, with all its servants, slaves, family and employees, to another location. Imagine the logistics involved. But, God was with him in this enormous business event, and blessed his business because of his faith.

It is not within the scope of this piece to describe all of the incidents in the Bible that illustrate the pattern set in Genesis – that God relates to people in their work in general, and their businesses in particular. For now, let me just list some of the examples:

Joseph – the business administrator whose faithfulness and business acumen prompted God to bless Pharaoh's household and ensure the survival of God's people.

Moses – a worker in a sheep-raising business who God set in place to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

David – the son of a business owner who God selected to consolidate the Israelites into a kingdom, and who grew closer to God primarily in the context of the military work given to him.

Jesus – in his human capacity was a small business owner – a carpenter -- who ushered in the Kingdom of God and changed the world.

Paul – a tentmaker who supported his evangelistic efforts through his business.



Lydia – a small business owner who, upon hearing the good news, believed and was baptized, and influenced her entire business to do likewise. Her business then formed an instant church.

This is just the short list. The long list can go on for pages. But you get the idea. God is a worker. He created man to be a worker. It is in work, and business for those who have one, that he relates to us. God works with us.

Over and over again, he shows us how he joins us, in our work. Just so we get the point, he says, in Romans 12:1:

*"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper **worship.**"*

Clearly, worship is not what happens in the confines of a church building on Sunday mornings. Worship is what we do when we work – it's a lifestyle of communication with God within the context of our work and our businesses.

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Confirming this 'work as worship' concept is Colossians 3:22-24:

"²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

While the charge is directed specifically at slaves, it's not a stretch to see it, in today's economy, as applying to workers. When we work, we are to do so with the understanding that we serve the Lord Christ in our work.

From the very first chapter of the Bible through this passage at the tail end, the message is clear, and the pattern is consistent. Your business is not just a means of making money. It is, first and foremost, the place in which we engage with God and serve and worship the Lord.

Which brings us back to where we started.

The idea that *“Christianity is about going to church and worshipping God. Business is about making money,”* is not only a cataract belief, obscuring the reality of God’s word, but is exactly the reverse of what the scriptures teach.



One last test. Assume for a moment that you hold to this cataract belief. How do you feel about yourself, your relationship with God, and your place in the Kingdom?

Now, just for a moment, take on the opposite belief. Assume that you accept the concept that *“Your business – and your work -- is not just a means of making money. It is, first and foremost, the place in which you engage with God and serve and worship the Lord.”* How does that make you feel?

If you are like most Christian business people, the cataract belief makes you feel second class, like you are just a business person. The opposite belief empowers you, makes you feel like you have a special ministry in this world, that you are a knight in the Lord’s army, responsible for a cellular unit in God’s economy.

When we accept this cataract belief, we nail one more screen over the light of the Holy Spirit, and allow a false paradigm to cloud our vision.

Chapter Three:

Cataract beliefs #2 – “I am required to give my tithe to the local church”

Here’s another one of those commonly-held beliefs that most Christians never question. Yet, the belief distorts the believer’s view of reality, and causes a whole list of negative consequences.

So, let’s ask the question, “Am I really required to give my tithe to the local church?” What does the Bible really say about that?

One of the favorite verses to quote when it comes to giving is Malachi 3:10.

This oft-quoted passage really speaks to the giver’s heart and the amount of the gift, but that isn’t the question here. We are not, in this article, considering those issues. Instead, we are focusing on the ‘giftee.’ To whom, or to what, should we be giving?

There are a number of passages in the New Testament that shed light on that. I Corinthians 9:1-14 speaks to the issue. In this passage Paul asserts that he and Barnabus, being itinerant apostles/evangelists, have a right to be supported by the folks they disciple. They just chose not to exercise that right. So, clearly, we have the apostles teaching that it is appropriate for Christians to support the itinerant evangelists who disciple them.

In II Corinthians 8 & 9, Paul encourages the Corinthians to give more. It includes the other most often quoted passages on giving, verses 7 & 8:



"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in ever good work."

The only problem is that the verse really doesn't speak to the question – give to whom? But, the next verse does, as Paul quotes Psalm 112:9: *"They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever."*

Who should be the recipient of the gift? The poor. Earlier in these two chapters, Paul refers several times to the recipient of the gift in ways that clearly indicate it will be given to Christians who are suffering and are in need.

I Timothy 5:17 – 18 teaches that the elders within the local church can also be supported. Elders, as I'm sure you know, are always plural, were raised up within the local group of people, and meet the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Very few pastors are qualified to be Biblical elders.



Galatians 6:6-7 continues to expand on that theme, indicating that we should share "all good things" with the people who disciple us.

Romans 15:25-28 introduces an additional 'approved' focus for gifts. In this passage, Paul describes the gift to the poor Jewish Christians that some other Christians had made. While this passage is descriptive, not prescriptive, it's not a big leap to see that giving to other poor Christians is encouraged.

James 1:27 expands on this theme:

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

While “look after” implies a greater relationship than just money, certainly giving and supporting orphans and widows is implicit in the phrase.

There is one passage that speaks specifically to the question. I Corinthians 16:1 & 2: *“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem.”*

So, the one clear, unambiguous teaching in the New Testament about giving says exactly the opposite of “you are required to give your tithes to the church.” It says that you shouldn’t give it to the church, you should save it every week, and then make one gift of the saved up money when the opportunity is right -- and you should give it to poor Christians!

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Let’s consolidate what these passages teach: It is appropriate to support itinerant apostles/evangelists, the elders among you who oversee the congregation, those who disciple you, and others in need, particularly needy Christians and orphans and widows. You are not to give it regularly, but save it up and make personal gifts when the opportunity presents itself.

In spite of this direction from the New Testament writers, a lot of people just decide to give their gifts to the local institutional church, accepting the teaching they hear from the pulpit without ever questioning it. Therefore a lot of people believe they are “required to give your tithes to the {institutional} church.”

The people who most convincingly proclaim this message, are, of course, those who have a vested interest in receiving it.

There are a couple of problems with that. First, you are giving your gift to someone who then decides what to do with it. This intermediary step creates a distance between you, the giver, and the person receiving the gift, makes the gift seem impersonal, and robs the transaction of some of its spiritual power. There is a spiritual impact of one person making a gift to another in the name of Jesus, and that impact vanishes when there are layers of people who handle the money in the process. Additionally, this practice of giving to the local congregation puts a lot of pressure on whoever is running the congregation to make decisions for someone else’s gift.

And, a case can be made that giving supports the pastor. However, ‘pastors’ in the modern sense of the word, are unknown in the New Testament. It could not be what the New Testament writers had in mind, because they did not exist.

Further, typically institutional churches spend money on a lot of other things that aren’t on the ‘approved list.’ For example, a large percentage of the income often goes to pay off and maintain the church building. The New Testament knew nothing of this. In his book, *Pagan Christianity*, George Barna traces the use of church buildings to the pagan practices of Constantine in 300 AD. Church buildings are man-made entities that serve to siphon money from the biblical uses of it to something else.

Additional funds go to other ‘staff’ – worship leaders, administrators, and all the typical staff positions that a functioning organization employs. None of these, of course are authorized in the scriptures.

In addition, some portion of the income typically goes to support the denominational bureaucracy. And, of course, denominations are clearly denounced in the Bible (I Corinthians 1:10-17; John 17: 20 – 23).

Let's just imagine, for a minute, what would happen if just 10% of the church-going Christians in this country decided to give scripturally. Probably several hundred



million dollars would be re-directed from church buildings and professional staff to directly impacting the poor and needy. While some pastors may have to get jobs, and some congregations merged with others, imagine the impact for the cause of Christ. Literally millions of hurting, needy people would receive personal gifts from people who

knew them – gifts made in the name of Christ. How many of them would respond to this personal act of Christian love and turn toward a relationship with our savior?

That one act alone might be enough to start a ground swell of activity in this country that could result in a revival, and a reversal of the trend toward anti-Christianity in the culture.

In the last few decades, the institutional church system in this country has spent \$530 billion, and not increased the percentage of born-again Christians by even one percent. Can there be a more egregious waste of money?

In the last few decades, the institutional church system in this country has spent \$530 billion, and not increased the percentage of born-again Christians by even one percent.

Here then, is one person's opinion. Are you required to give your tithe to the local institutional church? No. In fact, the overwhelming weight of New Testament teaching supports just the opposite.

Your giving should be personal, directed by the Holy Spirit, and in keeping with the examples and directions in scripture. Giving to the local institutional church violates these guidelines. Do exactly what Paul commands us to do: Save up, every week, some portion from that with which you have been prospered. Then, seek to make personal gifts in accordance with the guidelines described in the New Testament.

Chapter Four:

Cataract belief #3: *Our congregation must be led by a pastor*

OK, I know that some of you don't use the word pastor. You may have ministers, preachers or priests. It doesn't matter what you call them. They are all specially trained men (or women) who are expected to officiate at the worship services, present a message from the pulpit, preside at weddings and funerals, be active in all sorts of church events and programs, visit the sick, and more or less be the professional Christian leader within the congregation. As one of the "ministers" I have known described it – "to be the hub of the wheel around which everything revolves." Sort of like a king is to a secular

So, what's wrong way it should be? How way? What would we do us?

I agree, it looks seminary-trained pastor, assured of (or so it person to bring thoughtful lessons from the pulpit. That is certainly edifying for everyone.



group. with that? Isn't that the could it be any other without a pastor to lead

good. By having a the congregation is seems) an educated

And there is someone to watch over the teaching in the church, to make sure that no one strays off the line. And certainly someone has to officiate at weddings and funerals. And church members are too busy to visit the sick and a

pastor/preacher/minister/priest has the time to do that. All of those are good things. So what's the problem?

The problem is this. All of these reasons are mankind's good thinking, but they depart from God's simple practices. To make it simpler – it's not Biblical! No matter how hard you look in the New Testament, you cannot find, anywhere, anything like our modern pastors.

In the book of Acts, there are 29 places where groups of Christians are either mentioned or implied. In none of these is there anything equivalent to our modern pastors.

Yes, there were apostles who taught and evangelized. But these special people were imbued with special knowledge and authority that no pastor in our age would dare to claim. Today's pastors cannot trace their lineage back to the apostles. And the involvement of an apostle in a local group of Christians was the exception, not the rule.

The predominant practice was that groups of disciples were left on their own, with no person having any kind of authority over the small group. The common practice of the apostles was to trust the new believers to the care and safekeeping of the Holy Spirit.

What about elders? Yes, when a group of Christians had grown sufficiently that some in their midst were conforming their character to that of Christ, those thus qualified were occasionally appointed as elders – a confirmation of the service they had already been providing the disciples.

Aren't pastors elders of a sort? A few could develop into elders. But they'd have to meet the very clear qualifications spelled out in Titus and I Timothy. Clearly, these qualifications speak to the development of a person's character, and have nothing to do with seminaries or education. A few of the differences – elders are always mentioned in the plural while a pastor is a singular figure; elders are raised up from among the people they serve, while pastors are imported from outside the congregation; elders are qualified by virtue of their character, pastors are ordained based on their education.

The position of pastor in our modern churches and the biblical role of “elder” are light years apart.

Clearly, our modern pastors are not (with a few exceptions) biblical elders. They are something else. Something we don’t see anywhere in the Bible.

But what about Ephesians 4 verses 11 – 13, you’re asking. This is the passage that reads:

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

Doesn’t that passage establish the position of “pastor?” No. It’s a mistranslation. The original Greek word which is here translated as “pastor” is in every other place in the New Testament translated as “shepherd,” and used to refer to biblical elders or Jesus himself. In other words, the passage should read “shepherds and teachers” or “elders and teachers.” In no way does this passage authorize the creation of a new class of Christian leaders. Perhaps the reason for the use of the word “pastor” had to do with the occupations of those doing the translating.

There is then, no biblical basis for having seminary-trained professional Christian pastors in our churches.



But what about the practical side? Let’s set the biblical case aside and consider the practical consequences. When one person is responsible for bringing the message at the worship service, that removes the responsibility from everyone else. The net result is that the mass of people moves

further away from God, not closer to Him. Imagine how active and involved everyone would be if they had no one to pay to do it for them!

By removing the central figure, you move the responsibility out to the congregation. People become more active, live their Christianity more completely, and become closer to God. That is, of course, exactly the Apostles command to the church about how to meet together. You probably haven't heard many sermons on this:

I Corinthians 14:26

26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

Note that Paul didn't say "one of you." He said "each of you." There is a clear, direct unambiguous command about how to meet together, and that clear, direct unambiguous command is routinely ignored by the institutional church establishment.

And then there is Jesus' last recorded prayer, in John, chapter 17, versus 20 – 23:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

He passionately prays for unity among his people, acknowledging that unity among Christians is a sign to the world that we are of Christ. By implication, a lack of unity indicates the opposite. Yet, our man-made system of

pastor/preacher/minister/priest fosters division. Christianity continues to splinter into smaller and smaller segments, called denominations. The man-made leaders find reasons to separate themselves from other groups, rallying their followers around some



issue that is expounded by the educated leaders but generally of little initial concern of the people, and build institutions based on a man-made distinction. The result? Thousands of denominations and a skepticism (rightly so) on the part of the non-Christian.

What does this have to do with you and your family?

It threatens your spiritual life and the spiritual well-being of your family. The pastor/preacher/minister/priest system encourages spectator Christianity. In that system, you and your family are expected to be passive on-lookers in the worship entertainment offered by the established clergy. The more passive you and your family become, the more likely your spiritual life will atrophy.

It works like this: The more responsible the paid professional is, the less responsible you and your family are. The less responsible you and your family are, the less likely that you'll be active and growing. The less likely you'll be active and growing, the more likely that you'll die, spiritually.

Didn't you ever wonder why so many modern Christians are apathetic, superficial Christians? It's in a great measure the result of the institutional church system that encourages by its practices (not by its rhetoric) a passive, spectator Christianity.

And what about the continuing proliferation of denominations? What impact does that have on you and your family?

Each denomination must, by virtue of the fact that it is a worldly organization, have levels of authority. In place of Christ the head of the family and the local church, we have regional conferences, national headquarters, departments and committees. All of this creates a political environment that encourages further division, and siphons the power and focus of the church away from Christ's charge, and directs it to internal maneuvering.



So, your family is left with a view of Christianity that seems more concerned with institutional maneuvering, programs and policies, then it does with the simple gospel.

This impression of Christianity again leads to skepticism and a jaundiced view of the Gospel. In this confusing world, where it's difficult to know with which denomination to affiliate, it seems just as valid to not be involved at all.

In light of Christ's prayer for unity, how do you explain over 40,000 denominations? Could it be that the institutional church is not Christ's church?

The pastor/preacher/minister/priest system has created a world that threatens the spiritual life of you and your family.

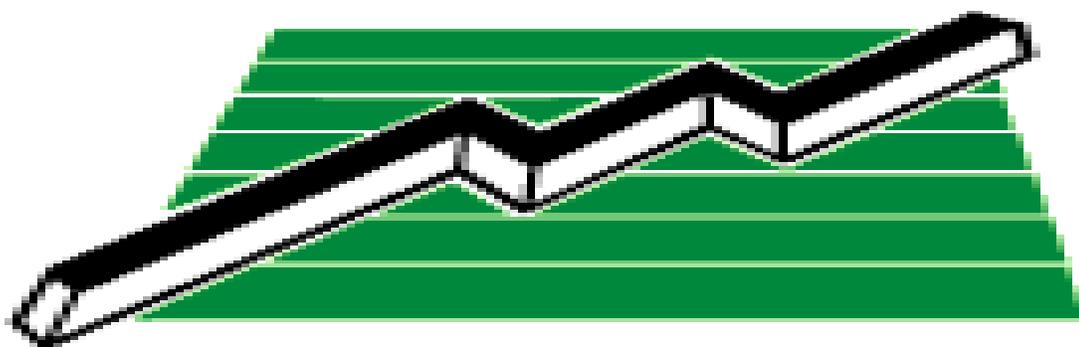
It's a clear case of mankind (in this case, institutional Christian leaders) substituting their view of what is "good" for God's simple, yet far better, practices. Just like the clamor by the Israelites for a king eventually resulted in the splintering and loss of most of the Israelite nation, so too, our modern cultural demand for a pastor is directly responsible for the splintering of Christ's church and the apathy and spiritual death of

millions of modern Christians. Yet it is so deeply imbedded in our culture that few people have ever questioned it.

But that's only one of the deep, cataract beliefs that cloud our vision. In the next chapter we'll consider another.

Chapter Five:

Cataract Belief #4: *This congregation must grow*



If you're involved in a congregation, I'm sure that the subject of congregational growth has come up over and over again. It's given as the reason for a whole host of pulpit-directed efforts.

We have to raise money for a building fund. Why? Because the congregation needs to grow.

We need to hire a youth minister. Why? Because the congregation has to grow.

We need to create these new programs. Why? Because the congregation has to grow.

And so on and so forth. Now, have you ever seen anyone question the assumption that "the congregation must grow?" Anybody stand up in a congregational meeting and say, "Why?" Any brave soul write a letter to the editor (usually the pastor/preacher/minister/priest) of the newsletter asking the question why?

Probably not. That's one of the unquestioned beliefs that no one dares question. To do so would subject you to the whispered judgment of a majority of the people. It's just not done. Culturally unacceptable. A cataract belief.

Too bad. It ought to be questioned.

Before we consider the biblical view, let's analyze the practical consequences of congregation growth. What happens when congregations make major efforts to grow?

First, the process of growth is often expensive, requiring funding to build new buildings, put on new programs, hire new staff, pay for advertising, newsletters, etc. And, while all of this seems good, the reality is that it often moves the focus of the church from the simple message of the gospel to the more complex message promoting "our church." Congregational members become involved in church programs, church messages, and church initiatives which substitute the "church" for the gospel.

And then, there are the effects of successful church growth programs. On the one hand, the worship service has more people, and seems more exciting and uplifting. There often are more hands available for church programs, so the core group doesn't need to volunteer for everything. They get a little break.

And, since the congregation is now larger, the weekly collection is bigger. That means that you can hire additional professional staff to take over what church members were doing before. No need to have a volunteer organize a youth ministry, you can now afford a professional. No need to have a member of the congregation teach a Sunday school class, you have an associate pastor who can do that. As the congregation grows, it can afford more professional staff, maybe a full time church secretary, hey, maybe even a pastor of administration!

All of this seems good. You can invite your friends to Sunday worship knowing that you won't be embarrassed by amateur performances. Seems good.



But there is a devastating flip side. As the congregation grows, often more and more of the budget is siphoned off to the support of professionals, the funding of programs, and the building of buildings. The more money and energy devoted to these things, the less devoted to the simple work of the church. The more

bureaucrats and professionals your church employs, the less need for involvement on the part of the people.

God's charge that we are all ministers and priests becomes just a hollow statement that is ignored or given lip service, but not really pursued. And the more professional and polished is your worship service, the more it encourages spectator Christianity. Often, the net result of congregational growth is the super involvement of a few, and the alienation and marginalization of the vast majority.

Often, the net result of congregational growth is the super involvement of a few, and the alienation and marginalization of the vast majority.

You and your family could be one of them. As the congregation grows, often it only succeeds in building a larger bureaucracy and a bigger building, leaving the vast majority of members in spiritual sleep.

That's the devastating consequence of congregational growth. You and your family could very well be sucked into the effort, causing you to change your focus from the simple gospel of Christ to the building fund, the search for another professional, or the management of another pulpit-directed program.

Or, you could be left on the margins. Expected to be a spectator in the growing professionalization of the congregation. No longer necessary – thanks for your time, now move over and let the professionals do it.

What seems good to mankind is actually devastating to much of the congregation. Man's "good" substitutes for God's best.

But what about the biblical view? Isn't it mandated that congregations grow?

NO!

The great commission given to the church in Matthew 28:19 says:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

Jesus did not say, "Stay, therefore, around your neighborhood, inviting people to church, building ever-bigger buildings and programs."

OK, I know that not everyone can be a foreign missionary, etc. However, the point is that Jesus said "make disciples, baptize and teach." He did not say, "build the local congregation."

The mistake we make is when we believe that building the local congregation is a means to the end of evangelizing the world. The truth is that it is generally a substitute for it! Normally, when we're building the local church, we're engaged in activities that substitute for pure Christianity. We invite our saved neighbors to church, we don't invite our unsaved friends to Christ. We encourage our kids to support the youth ministry instead of teaching them at home.

The mistake we make is when we believe that building the local congregation is a means to the end of evangelizing the world. The truth is that it is generally a substitute for it!

What would happen to Christianity in this country if we believed that it is Christ's church that must grow, not necessarily our local congregation? What would happen if we focused on Christ, not "church?" Wouldn't we be more active in promoting Christ, not our church? When someone came to Christ, wouldn't we be more concerned about personally discipling him/her instead of seeing to it that they got shuffled to the appropriate class?

And if our congregation did grow, what would happen if instead of building a new building and hiring new staff, we encouraged a group to form their own small congregation? Wouldn't the net result be more people active, more leaders created, more personal ministry, less money spent on bricks and mortar, less money spent on professional clergy, and Christ's church growing more rapidly?

The myth that our congregation must grow is one of the most deceptive of them all. It seems like such a good idea. But remember, mankind's good is a poor substitute for God's best.

What's the impact on you and your family? Energy, money, gifts and talents wasted. Instead of building a relationship with Christ, you're in danger of focusing on the efforts of the church. Relationships No, programs YES. And the further away you and your family move from the purity of Christianity, the sadder and more unfulfilled are your lives. Focus your energy and your family's on the "congregation must grow" and you are likely to look back in sadness and regret a number of years from now.

Chapter Six:

Cataract Belief #5: *Church is primarily about worship service*

Our culture has instilled in our minds the idea that church is about worship services. This idea is so central to the modern church's view of "church" that we could not conceive of church as anything other than this.



Visit any institutional church and you will always find a worship service. In fact, much of the energy and money spent by the modern church is spent to just so we can have worship services. We need to build a larger sanctuary. Why? So we

can all worship together. We need to hire a "worship leader." Why? So we can have more professional worship services.

Again, this concept is so deeply instilled that no one can question it without being viewed as beyond radical, or immensely stupid.

But maybe they should be questioned. Let's again consider this from the viewpoints of the practical consequences and the biblical perspective.

What about worship service? Isn't that the heart of Christianity? Shouldn't we be worshipping together?

Hey, it can be inspiring to be part of a big group singing together. And a solid lesson delivered by an experienced professional is always an edifying thing. Those are good things.

But is it worth it? As long as we believe that it is, we'll need "worship leaders," and large buildings in which to worship. For a few moments of emotional lift once a week, we pay professional clergy millions of dollars each year, and spend billions on huge sanctuaries.

The only problem is that it isn't scriptural. "Wait a minute," you're thinking, "doesn't the Bible command us to have worship services?"

Actually, no. There is no example of a worship service in the New Testament, and no command to do so. Not only is the idea of a worship service entirely a man-made concept, the Bible actually teaches something different.

When we come together as a group, it is not for the purpose of worshipping God! It is for the purpose of building one another up. Read I Corinthians 14:26 cited below. This clear, direct command is routinely ignored and avoided by 99.9 percent of churches, who prefer their tradition of professional-lead worship services to the interactive assemblies of the New Testament.

Worship, according to the Bible, is something else. Paul clearly describes what God expects from us as worship in Romans 12: 1:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

The worship that God expects is not an entertainment event run by professionals for an hour once a week. It is a lifestyle of commitment, obedience and sacrifice for our Lord.

"But," you're thinking, "it's traditional to have worship services. We've always had them." Jesus had something to say about that in Matthew 15:9:

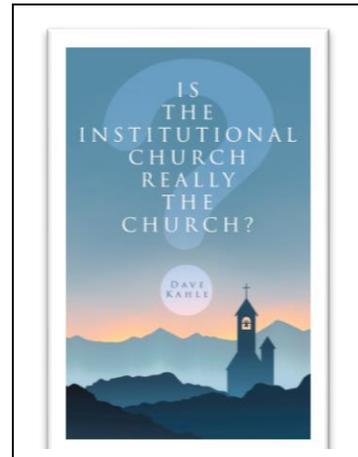
*"They **worship** me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."*

Most of the people who visit a church become turned off to Christ forever.

Isn't it time thoughtful people asked some questions?

Is the Institutional Church Really the Church?

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What if we didn't have "corporate worship services?" What would we do?

We'd probably meet together somewhere. Maybe in our homes? As we began to learn together, maybe we'd discover that biblical worship is a mind-set, not an event on the calendar. Maybe we'd go about our daily lives with an attitude of worship. Maybe we really would worship in "spirit and in truth."

But if we didn't have a "corporate worship service," what would we do when we gathered as a church?

Interestingly, the Bible has some ideas. You can find them in the dozens of "one-another's" commanded in the New Testament. Here's an idea. We could minister to each other! Our meetings, instead of revolving around an entertaining worship service, might be small groups ministering to each other.

Maybe we'd even follow Paul's command in I Corinthians 14: 26:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

The modern church has drifted so far from the simple plan God has for His people that it actually siphons resources away from the building of God's kingdom and has a devastating spiritual impact on you and your family. The institutional church

system, with its reliance on paid pastors, church buildings, teaching and worship services, has created a passive, spectator form of Christianity that bleeds the power out of its adherents.

Supported by our culture, these devastating practices and beliefs are classic examples of mankind's "good," substituting for God's best.

The impact of these practices can have an eternal consequence for you and your family because they draw your attention to efforts other than the pure simple Gospel of Christ, and lull you into spiritual apathy.

What to do about it?

Clearly you must begin with a great deal of prayer. You'll want to bring God into your decision-making process, and you'll need His guidance and power to follow through on any plan you create. Patiently and fervently pray for His guidance.

It may be that you are led to begin with some small steps. It may be that you find yourself looking as your home as your initial "church." You may want to begin Bible studies within your family, so that you grow less dependent on the professionals. You may want to begin to set aside your "give" money each week in a fund, and wait on the Lord to show you what to do with it. You may want to begin to identify and exercise your spiritual gifts, independent of any congregational affiliation.

These are all examples of small steps away from dependence on the institutional church's practices.

It may be that God leads you to seek out a home church, or to start one. You may be surprised to find that there are resources and support on the Internet as well as in almost every community.

Regardless of the steps you take to move away from your dependence on these spiritually devastating practices, you should be aware that your ideas will be viewed as alarming and radical by almost everyone in the institutional church system with whom you share them. Your pastor will probably tell you that you are absolutely wrong, your

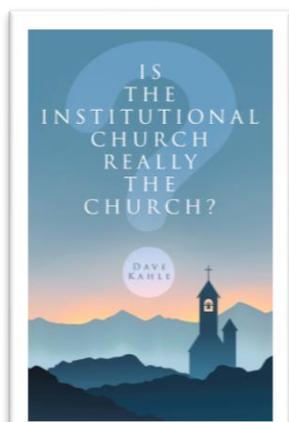
friends will not understand, and others in your current church will view you as a threat. The seminaries, denominational officials, and all the other professional Christians who have a vested interest in the status quo of the institutional system may ridicule you and be angry at you.

On the other hand, as you leave the confines of the institutional church system, you'll be amazed to find like-minded people all over the place. You'll discover a populous world of non-church Christians who share your interest in a deeper relationship with Christ and more biblical life style. As you take steps to remove yourself from the institution, the Lord will place people in your life to take its place.

Think carefully about trying to change the church or convince your pastor of your point of view. In the history of the church, countless thousands of folks have tried to reform the church, and have inevitably failed. The power of these embedded cataract beliefs is incredible. Remember, the 'clergy' has a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and historically, will resort to fear, guilt and intimidation to get you to comply.

In just the same way that Jesus was a threat to the established religious institutions of His time, so you will be viewed as a threat by the institutional establishment. Stay the course; seek out like-minded people with whom to associate.

Deepen your relationship with Christ and the other Christians in your life. Allow God to lead you.



And expect the benefits of living under God's simple practices for His people instead of mankind's seemingly improved versions.

In the last few decades, the institutional church system has spent \$530 billion, and has not expanded the percentage of Christians by even one percentage point. Isn't it time thoughtful people asked some questions? [Learn more.](#)

Chapter Seven:

Cataract Belief #6: *If you are not a professional Christian, you are really just second class*

For much of my Christian life, I've struggled with a difficult and painful image of myself: I was a second-class Christian.

No one ever said that to me in so many words, but the practices of the Christian community made it perfectly clear. Those practices have evolved in response to a belief that permeates our Christian culture so deeply that few Christians would ever question it. Unfortunately, the result of this belief is that millions of Christians, like myself, lead lives that are far less productive than God wants. That means that the Church's influence and impact is light years away from that which it could be.

Let's gain a little perspective.

I became a Christian when I was 24 years old, and have walked with the Lord ever since. For much of these 30 years, I have been puzzled by what I have seen as a mystery. On one hand, I read in the New Testament about the early church and see that it was filled with the Spirit, enthusiastic, energetic, joyful and victorious. In a very short time, it had penetrated into much of the known world. That's the church that the Lord established. But then, I look around me, and see a church that is apathetic, passive and lethargic. I look at my own life and am disappointed by the feeble expressions of the gifts of the Spirit.

This contradiction between the vibrant church of the New Testament and the apathetic church of 21st Century America has always been a source of puzzlement to me. Why, I've wondered, is that? When we have the same Spirit as the early Christians, why was the power of that Spirit so much more visible and powerful than it is today?

The culprit? Ourselves. More specifically, the cataract beliefs and false paradigms that we hold onto. Here's the next. See if this doesn't sound familiar.

Real ministry is defined by the time you spend in the official efforts of the church to evangelize the lost and edify the saved. This is the work that God is interested in, that He considers most important, special and significant.

If you are like most Christians, you are nodding your head, thinking, "Of course, who would ever question that?"

The expressions of this are all around us. Remember, paradigms shape our attitudes and determine our behavior. So we can look at attitudes and behavior and use them to discover the paradigm that lies under the surface.

Here are some examples of this paradigm – or cataract belief -- in practice. One of my clients recently indicated to me that one of his sales people had left the company to go into the "full time ministry." We all know what he means by that. This person is going to make his living in some sanctioned work of some church. That's real ministry. What he was doing before was just making a living.

A few years ago, I read Bob Buford's book entitled, "Halftime." I was impressed with it, and bought several to give to friends. The premise of the book, written primarily to Christian business people, was that now that in the first half of your life you have achieved some degree of success, use the second half to do something significant. Donate your time, money and talents to a ministry. Another expression of the paradigm.

It's not unusual to hear a pastor or fellow Christian talking about "God's work," or referring to the church building as "God's house." This kind of language indicates, of course, that God is more interested in these things than he is other things that are not "God's work" or places that are not "God's house."

I could site hundreds of other examples, but you get the idea. This concept of ministry is a deeply held, pervasive paradigm that is embraced to some degree by almost all of 21st Century Christendom.

But let's take a moment to consider the implications of this paradigm. Consider that if some work is significant, what does that say about other work? Insignificant. If some effort is special, what does that say about other work? Ordinary. If some work is important, what does that say about other work? Unimportant.

In other words, if we hold "church work" to be special, significant and important, then this says the rest of our lives are ordinary, insignificant and unimportant.

But is that what the Bible teaches? Hardly. In fact, it's just the opposite. For example, Paul said that everything we do, if we do it as a service to Christ, is important:

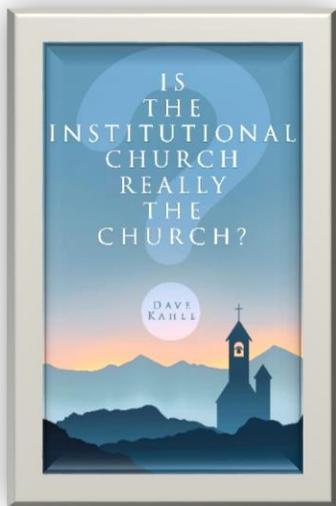
Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. I Cor 3: 23, 24

Clearly ministry in the Bible is not determined by what is done, but rather by for whom it is done. Whatever you do for Christ is ministry.

God's work and will for this world is far greater than just those activities we know as "church work." God desires to extend the kingdom into every aspect of His creation. He expects us to be obedient to Him and offer our lives as ministry, to extend His influence into every nook and cranny of His world. When we go to a meeting at our children's school, we are taking Christ's influence with us, extending His impact into that aspect of creation. When we go to work, we are extending Christ's influence into those contacts with people with whom we connect. When we talk with a neighbor, fill the car

up with gas, cut the grass, or shop for groceries, we are Christ's ambassadors, extending His influence into those realms.

Jesus called us to be the salt of the world. He intentionally chose that analogy. Salt has no value when it is held inside the salt shaker crushed against other grains of salt. It is only when it is mixed with other things that salt imparts its influence on that around us. So too for us. When we are huddled with one another in the confines of church buildings we are not fulfilling the ministry that God appointed to us. While time together may be helpful for encouragement and equipping, it's a means to an end. The end is our influence in our ministries that we call our lives.



Sixty to eighty percent of the children raised in the institutional church will leave the faith as adults.

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Here's a little self-test. Imagine yourself in two totally different mental states. In one, you believe that your talents, experience, education and the gifts that you use in your job and your family are of little interest to God. They are just the way to fill your week. The really important things to God occur only on Sunday mornings. You understand that church work is real ministry and that our lives are something that God really doesn't care that much about. He's more interested in evangelism and edification under the auspices of a church than He is in anything we might do in our daily lives. Church work is special. What you and I do most of our lives is ordinary. Church work is significant, and what you and I do is insignificant. While you desire to be active and

pleasing to God, you know you cannot be because you aren't ordained, you are not a full time minister, and you have not enough time to devote to church work.

Now that you are temporarily immersed in that mindset, ask yourself some questions. How energized are you to see your life as meaningful to God? To what degree do you feel filled with the Holy Spirit every minute of the day? How close to God do you feel? How great is your Christian influence on those around you? Record your thoughts and feelings.

Now, consider the opposite paradigm. Image yourself fully accepting and believing this:

God has selected you for a special ministry which you alone can fulfill. You believe that God has personally and specifically equipped you with experience, talents, gifts and education to use in your job and your family. He has personally given you a ministry that is incredibly important to the growth of his kingdom and is directly in the center of His will. This ministry is your work and your family. Every moment of it is empowered by the Holy Spirit, ordained by God, and overseen by Jesus Christ. He has appointed you to be his unique ambassador to take His influence into every corner of His creation touched by you. What you do on Sunday morning or in regards to the institutional church is only incidental to your main and special ministry.

Now ask yourself the same questions. How enthusiastic are you? How full of the Holy Spirit? How close to God? How excited to be using your spiritual gifts? How energized are you to see your life as meaningful to God? To what degree are you inspired to and feel filled with the Holy Spirit every minute of the day? How great is your Christian influence on those around you?

If you are like most of us, you'll quickly see that the first paradigm serves to depress the power of the Holy Spirit, to isolate you under the burden of a debilitating self-image, to hinder the power of the Holy Spirit in the church. Yet, the second paradigm does just the opposite, energizing you with spiritual power and purpose. The second mindset fosters an attitude of joy, peace commitment and empowerment.

Consider the impact of these two mindsets on your Christianity. Now multiply your thoughts and feelings times the millions of Christians in the world. Imagine the impact on the universal church, and consider the impact on the growth and impact of the kingdom.

The conclusion is obvious. The cultural paradigm that holds “church work” as a higher calling than real work is an insidious, debilitating concept. It’s time to do away with it. It’s time to recognize that our lives, when lived for Christ, are our highest and most noble ministries. We have been selected by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to extend the kingdom into every area of creation.

Chapter Eight:

Cataract Belief #7: *If you don't attend church services regularly, you are not a real Christian.*

This is, of course, the mantra of those who make their living from the institutional church system. It's understandable. If they can't get a sufficient quantity of folks attending their services, their livelihood is at risk. The amount of influence they have, among their peers and with the church-attenders, is directly proportionate to the attendance at their services. In many ways, their image of themselves is wrapped up in size of the collection and the numbers of attendees. So, they are often passionate about proclaiming the need to attend church services.

They will use fear, guilt and peer pressure to influence those who consider leaving. Here's a typical example from Key Wytsma book, *The Grand Paradox*:

"When I see someone in the church who is beginning to develop a critical view of church, I know I am looking at a "terminal Christian." That individual might not be dead yet, but she is on a trajectory that leads to separation from the people of God, and separation from the people God has identified with will ultimately mean separation from God himself. And separation from God is death (p. 137)"

Notice that the only people "God has identified with" are the members of his congregation! Question the institutional church system, in other words, and you are in danger of death!

If you've been in the institutional church system for long, you'll recognize that mindset. It is ubiquitous within the system.

So, clearly, the movers and shakers in the institutional church system, not surprisingly, proclaim dire consequences to anyone who even questions involvement in their institutions.

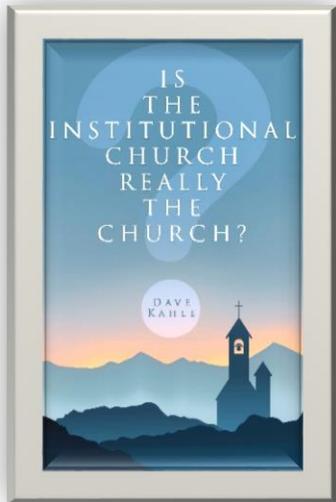
Are they right? Is regular attendance at the local expression of the institutional church system necessary? Can you be a Christian and be outside of the institution?

Personally, I've found the exact opposite to be true. By leaving the institutional church system, I have grown closer to God. It was like a great cloud has been lifted up from around my eyes. I see God more clearly than ever. My focus has become crystalized on him – not the policies and politics and programs of the local church. I began to interact with other Christians in more quantity and quality than at any time in my life. My prayers have become more personal and passionate, and I have begun to hear from him with increasing clarity and frequency. My spiritual life has grown so rapidly and substantially that I often apologize to him that it took me so long to finally remove myself from the institution.

Apparently, that experience is not unique. A number of people who have left the institution have reported the same thing. A Google search for “Institutional church” will reveal dozens of folks who proclaim the freedom and deepened spirituality they experienced upon leaving the institution. Spend just a little bit of time researching, and you'll come across comments like this, commenting on a blog post:

The further I step away from the institutional church and its focus on buildings, money, keeping an institutional structure afloat even if it hurts people, the more I feel closer to God. The further away I get from the broken institutionalized “poor man’s country club” the more I feel a weight lifted from my spiritual life. I feel there has been a block wall between my soul and God. As I step away from institution, structure, hierarchy, who turn it all into a business-like entity with CEO mentality, the more I hear God, see God, feel God, and feel peace in my life. I am 42. I am Generation X. What I desire most is being in relationship with other Christians who are genuine and want to go deep.

This experience that I had is, evidently, a very common experience among those who leave the institutional church. You'll see the same language being used over and over again: It is like a huge cloud has been lifted from your spiritual life and you enter into a deeper relationship with God.



There is no statistical difference between the churched and the unchurched on measures indicating a changed life.

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Is the Institutional Church Really the Church?

[Learn More.](http://www.acalltoarms.co/is-the-institutional-church-really-the-church-2/) (<http://www.acalltoarms.co/is-the-institutional-church-really-the-church-2/>)

There are, I'm sure, hundreds of thousands of people who have had the same experience, but who haven't shared it so publically. I believe it is a movement of the Lord to unleash his people from the shackles of the institutional church system and to breath the Holy Spirit into them in greater ways. As more and more people come out from under the rituals and politics of the system, the Lord is using them to ignite a revival.

But, you're thinking, what about the Bible? Doesn't it require us to go to church? No. There is no such things as "going to church" in the Bible. When you repent and are baptized, you are added to the Lord's church. (Acts 2:38) You are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you. As we've shown in the earlier chapters of this book, the institutional church system is a man-made effort to impose man's ideas on what is the Lord's bride.

The trump card of the institutional church apologists is Hebrews 10:24:

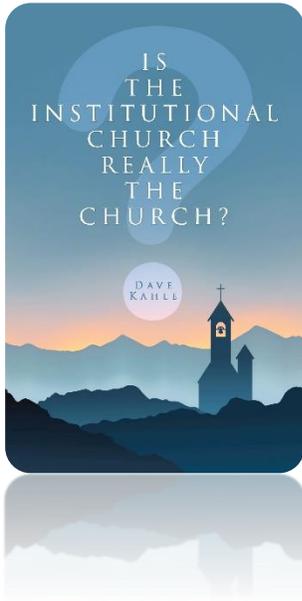
²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This verse is used to bludgeon questioners over the head with guilt, and to fill the pews for every church service. If you don't show up for the Sunday evening service, for the Sunday school session, for the youth group, for the Wednesday evening session, etc., or so the reasoning goes, you are, of course, "giving up meeting together" and therefore your spiritual life is in jeopardy.

Is that what the Hebrews writer is saying? Actually, not. He certainly cannot be referring to the assemblies of the institutional church, because there was no institutional church. No pastors, no church buildings, and no worship services. Those things didn't start showing up until hundreds of years later. Probably, he was referring to the ad hoc get-togethers of Christians, as they encountered each other in the marketplace, and in the day-to-day efforts in their workplace. It's a reminder that Christianity is not a solitary lifestyle. Instead, we are to "spur one another", "encourage each other," and "meet together."

Interestingly, I have met more Christians, and met with more Christians, since I left the institutional church than I ever had when I was within it, even in my days as an elder. I've had far deeper experiences with God and far more significant experiences with his people since after I left the institution. My meetings with other Christians are more spirit-led than the forced and artificial gatherings of the institution. I can honestly say that, far more than in the days as an involved institutional church member and leader, I met more frequently and more deeply with other Christians – all Holy Spirit organized and directed.

The sooner you take the plunge and cut your ties with the institution, the sooner you will be free to experience a clearer vision of God's kingdom and the peace, joy and a greater fellowship with God that comes with it.



Sixty to eighty percent of the children raised in the institutional church will leave the faith as adults.

Isn't it time thoughtful people asked some questions?

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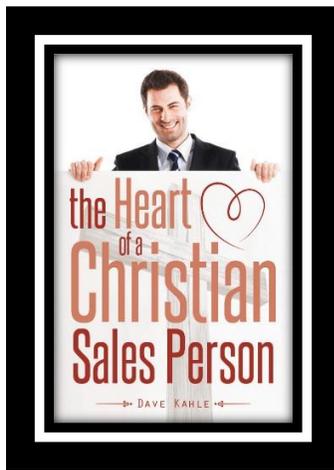
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This is a promotional graphic for the book 'How to Sell Anything to Anyone Anytime' by Dave Kahle. The background is red with a white grid pattern. On the left, two copies of the book are shown, one slightly behind the other. The book cover is white with a red price tag graphic that says 'HOW TO SELL ANYTHING TO ANYONE ANYTIME' and 'DAVE KAHLE'. To the right of the books is a photograph of Dave Kahle, a man with white hair, wearing a white shirt and a striped tie, smiling. Text to the right of the photo reads 'Practical and real world sales strategies that get results...'. Below the photo, it says 'Inspires and instructs everyone who wants to sell!'. At the bottom, there is a blue link: '[Click Here To Learn More!](#)'.

