

Virtual Christians #1

2012-05-12, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

The most valuable thing we have this side of heaven: His presence

When David's sin with Bathsheba was revealed, he repented and wrote Psalm 51 from an anguished heart. As with many Psalms, it is constructed like a teeter totter, with both ends balanced around the center piece.

That center piece is the cry of David's heart in verse 11: "Cast me not away from your presence; and take not your Holy Spirit from me." This is the sum total of all he says in this Psalm, his core cry to God, the center piece around which all else revolves: I want your presence and Spirit more than anything!

More than his musical gifts, more than the kingdom he ruled, more than his family, David valued the presence of the Lord in his life, and that is why this Psalm of repentance revolves around his heart's cry.

This is an Old Testament prayer - In our day we are born of the Spirit and the Holy Spirit doesn't leave us when we sin - yet David's heart cry is still valid for all who love His presence more than life itself! Don't take your Spirit from me! Don't cast me from your presence! I value Your presence in me more than anything else!

Make 2 columns

If you list the qualities of what a Christian looked like in the first century in one column, and in another column list qualities of how we define a Christian, you will see many differences.

Among the qualities you'll find in the early church is that individuals cherished the presence of the Lord as seen in: His presence in other believers they were in relationship and community with, His presence manifest in their giving to one another as God's hands on earth to meet material needs, His presence seen in miracles performed by people they were in relationship with, His presence as others taught the Word, and as seen in the sharing about Christ the other living temples expressed during their home based meetings.

The early church realized the amazing truth that Christ lives in each believer rather than a building, making each believer a living temple of God. They loved His presence in each other, so they met in homes for God Himself established the home and family, and while maintaining their own homes they lived in a sense of community and family with people of faith. Their meetings were informal, in home, marked by the presence of God in worship, teaching and sharing, prayer, and the meetings of practical needs through fellow disciples.

The presence of God in their lives was first and foremost. They were dependent on His presence as manifest through other believers with whom they were in relationship.

Evidence you are a Christian

If you were arrested today for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Would they use church attendance as evidence? Not likely for people of all beliefs go to buildings called temples and churches, so church attendance isn't evidence you are a Christian any more than going to a health club makes you a professional athlete.

Would they dig into your financial records to look at your giving? Statistics show non-believers give as much as believers to charities and churches, so that wouldn't qualify as evidence. Would they take your word that you believe in Jesus? Maybe, but is that Jesus the prophet like Muslims believe? Or is it Jesus the historical figure? A decent 1st year law school student could tear that apart in a second.

The pattern down through 2,000 years of history is that authorities use the testimonies of other people to prove people are Christians. Not their attendance, not their giving, not just their admission of faith, but they use the testimonies of people once in fellowship with the accused to seal the conviction.

The Virtual Christian

Traditional church teaches righteousness, and that is good. However, though righteousness comes through faith in Christ, it is proven only within relationships. That is why authorities through the ages have used the testimonies of those who know the person to convict, because a true disciple of Jesus will be in relationship and fellowship with other believers, even if some end up betraying them.

If you remove relationships with other disciples from a person's life, you end up with a person who says they are a Christian, but there is no evidence. You have, the Virtual Christian. I've sampled some definitions on the word 'virtual'

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below:

From thefreedictionary.com and answers.com

- 1) Existing or resulting in essence or effect though not in actual fact, form, or name.
- 2) Existing in the mind, especially as a product of the imagination.
- 3) Computer science created, simulated, or carried on by means of a computer or computer network.

From Bing.com

- 1) Being something in practice; being something in effect even if not in reality or not conforming to the generally accepted definition of the term.
- 2) Generated by computer; simulated by a computer for reasons of economic, convenience, or performance.
- 3) Hypothetical; describes a particle whose existence is suggested to explain observed phenomena, but is not proven or directly observable.

As I said; chapter and verse in one column, our Churchianity culture in another

When I was first born again, we knew who the genuine disciples of Jesus were because together we sought the presence of God - among our home based meetings, in our relationships with one another as we worked through difficulties, in our own lives - all ideas, thoughts, and habits bowed their knee to the Presence of the Lord, for we wouldn't let anything come between Him in us, and us.

But today a person is labeled 'born again' after a mere raising and lowering of the hand during meetings when every eye is closed, or someone is called a Christian even though they may be leading promiscuous lives, dishonest in business, living a life indistinguishable from a non-believer, or simply floating out there as a spiritual island.

Psalm 51 holds some keys for the Virtual Christian, and that is for next week...

Blessings,
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Virtual Christians # 2

2012-05-19, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

Last week...

...I started to examine what a 1st century Christian looked like and compared that with what we call 'Christian' today.

Go back in your mind to a time where there were no buildings called 'church'. To a time when believers in Jesus were rightly told God no longer lived in the temple in Jerusalem, but He now lives in each believer, and that is where you will find His presence.

They were taught they didn't have to scream and yell to get God's attention; He lived inside them and they had peace with God and He with them. They were taught they didn't have to go up to Him or bring Him down to them; He lived in them and was as close as their breath. (Romans 5: 1-5, 10: 6-10, Ephesians 2:4-7, Hebrews 12:22-24)

They were taught the various aspects of God's personality are seen in each living temple, and the various things that make each person unique are actually the Spirit of God in manifestation, and they prove God's presence in their lives as they walk through and work through life with Him. (I Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, 12:5-7, Galatians 5:22)

These living temples of God met in homes with other living temples, hungry for, looking for, and finding His presence in their midst. As seen in scripture, a Christian was a disciple, an active learner, an active student of Jesus Christ who endeavored to immediately apply whatever they learned of Him.

Cultural Christian?

There was no such thing as a 'cultural Christian'; you either believed and lived it, or you didn't.

These living temples cared for one another like no other segment of Greek, Roman, or Jewish culture did. They met each other's needs, worked through difficulties with one another, worked hard and were honest. No Christian was ever a beggar. If you saw a beggar on the street, you knew they weren't a Christian because Christians cared for each other. They were known for their love.

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Average people

Their leaders didn't live in mansions, they lived like everyone else, met in homes like everyone else, and most worked regular jobs, though full time leaders relied on monetary and other gifts for their living. And in this the people knew they had a network of support for their physical, social, and spiritual needs.

When they met, God was in their midst. And not only then: They knew they took God's presence within them to work, to play, to home, and to meetings with the rest of the living temples.

Presence

I shared how David's heart in Psalm 51 cried out; "Don't cast me from your presence! Don't take your Holy Spirit from me! The 1st century believers were keenly aware they carried the Presence of God within them.

Today what we call Christian is often not consistent with what scripture calls Christian. The first thing Paul asked the 12 men in Ephesus when he met them was: "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" The Holy Spirit IS the presence of God within. The Presence was all important to them. (Acts 19)

Virtual Christians

Today we have cultural Christians: "Well, my mom went to this church, and my grandma, so I'm a Christian by default", one might say. Or, "I was raised a Christian, I mean mom and dad were and I went to a Christian school and all, and I still believe I guess, but I don't really go to church." Or, "Every church I've been to has hurt me, so I just have church on the computer and TV and I'm fine."

Maybe they even attended a Bible school or advanced Sunday school - maybe they live like the world, gathering Christian teachings as needed to massage their guilt, or it may be the Holy Spirit drawing them though they keep Him at arm's length, or maybe they were 'red hot' for the Lord at one time, but are now about the same temperature as the fruit sitting on the kitchen counter.

As seen in the pages of the New Testament, none of the above would fit what Paul called Christian. They are what I'm calling, Virtual Christians. Pastors of traditional churches might include them in the group they call 'floaters'; that population of believers that attends no where and yet every where. But a Virtual Christian could also be one who never sets foot in a church as they don't care what flavor of the month is visiting no matter who or what it may be.

A Virtual Christian is a believer in Jesus who is opposite what scripture portrays as Christian. First century disciples were connected in a family and community network of believers both on a local and international level, seeking God's presence in each other, and purposing to grow and change in Christ day by day.

Today's Virtual Christian has no connection except by impersonal means, often thinks knowledge is the same as maturity, and has no outward indication they desire to grow as a person or as a person in Christ. They may even be happy being all alone in their faith - but that's not faith as defined in the New Testament - and that's my point.

What I'm suggesting is that Virtual Christians seek out the presence of God in various ways - a church's special speaker, special music, seasonal theme, their computer, pet doctrines, even wanting His presence while wallowing in their fears and hurts - they search everywhere for His Presence but where New Testament Christians sought out God's presence - with each other in small groups meeting in homes.

There is help for the heart and soul of a Virtual Christian and the people who love them...next week,

Blessings,
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Virtual Christians #3

2012-05-26, John Fenn, www.supernaturalhousechurch.org

Hi all,

I've been looking at how the New Testament defines a Christian and comparing that with our day, using David's cry of Psalm 51 as our start point: 'Cast me not from your presence'. One difference I see is that first century believers desired and sought out His presence in other believers by being around and a part of other believers' lives. Today, many opt out of relationships with other believers.

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When I first met the Lord I was a teenager, and desperately sought His presence. I sought His presence in the Word. That's the same with disciples in Paul's time - they sought out those who had been with Jesus to hear what He said, and they read with great hunger the writings of the apostles - our New Testament.

I sought His presence in worship. That's the same with disciples in Paul's time - various accounts in scripture and outside, reveal their home based meetings were full of worship, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as they made melody in their heart to the Lord.

I sought His presence by being around and connected with other disciples. That's the same with disciples in Paul's time - they were involved in each other's lives, so much so that basic needs were openly shared and met, and character was developed as they made allowances for one another and worked hard to keep the peace in love.

Again, righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. But righteousness is only revealed in the midst of relationships, for it is in those relationships **we prove Christ is in us** - with all the love, patience, forgiveness and perseverance required to have close friends in the faith.

Today, Christians can seek His presence in Word and worship, but forsake His presence in other believers many ways; by electronically staying 'in touch' with the body of Christ, by remaining anonymous in a traditional church setting, attending various church meetings all over a city but not risking getting to know anyone beyond recognizing a familiar face here and there. They are 'virtual' Christians - not what the New Testament defines as a disciple, but virtually one, one in appearance but not substance because they lack the relationships portrayed in the New Testament as essential for being a disciple of Jesus.

Digging into details

Hebrews 10:25 commands; "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another..." It is the only verse in the NT addressing those who have 'dropped out' of relationships with other believers, which reveals it was a relatively rare phenomenon in the first century.

The word 'forsake' here is 'enkataleipo'. The word 'leipo' (long o) is 'to leave'. The word 'kata' is bad, very bad - a strong negative. The word 'en' is 'in'. Literally then, 'forsake' means 'in leaving it is bad'. Also interesting is the word 'manner', which is 'ethos'. It means the character of a person expressed in attitude, habit and belief.

Putting this together, the writer of Hebrews stated it is 'bad leaving' to have an attitude, habit, and belief of forsaking the gathering together of ourselves. Ouch. Why would someone seek only God's presence in Word and/or worship, but be willing to give up His presence as seen in other disciples? First...

What David said in Psalm 51

The word 'presence' in our text of Psalm 51:11 is 'paniyim' (paw-neem; Strong's #6440) and is taken from the root 'paneh' (paw-neh) which means 'face'. Literally it means 'to look at' or 'before one's face or gaze'. David was crying out: Don't turn your face from me! Don't stop looking at me Oh Lord! I hunger for your manifest presence felt by your Spirit!

That some believers would shrink back from His presence, His face, as manifest through other believers, reveals the answer: When believers get to know one another in each other's day to day struggles, it is a form of the gaze of God looking at each other's lives.

When others rub us the wrong way, we ask, is it me or them? What can I do in this situation to be more Christ-like? It is righteousness proven through the interaction of relationships that we actually grow and change. This is how we apply the Word - to hear and not do is to deceive ourselves. (James 1:22)

Why do some become 'Virtual Christians'?

It is often fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of opening up and maybe being hurt, sometimes stubbornness in not wanting to change. It is less work to be a spiritual island than it is to get to know people because getting to know people means change as God 'looks at us' through the eyes of others, it means commitment and causes us to apply the Word to prove Christ does indeed live in us.

In v6 of Psalm 51, David said, "You desire truth in the inward parts; in the hidden part you reveal wisdom." The 'inward parts' means spirit and soul for the body is not hidden. The hidden part is the spirit, and where God puts wisdom. As David is about to cry out in v11 'Cast me not away from your presence nor take your Holy Spirit from me', he first says 'you want truth in my inward parts'!



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A virtual Christian must be willing to face the truth of his or her own heart. They must face the issues that have caused them to become virtual instead of the Bible defined believer. They must risk entering into relationships with other believers even though that means growth and change and yes, pain.

David continued in Psalm 51:16-17: "For you don't desire sacrifice, else I would give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart O God, you will not despise."

In the final analysis, the Virtual Christian cannot fall back on the past: God is looking for a humble and contrite heart as a way of life, now. But for many, that would mean turning their heart to cry out for His presence no matter where it is found, in Word, in worship, and proven within relationships, no matter the cost to pride or risk of hurt - the humble heart cries out as David did: I must have His presence!

New subject next week, blessings,
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