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"If You Love Me"

- Jn 14:15

In the last few years, a lot of people in the house church movement have been saying, "Churches need to be organic." The implication behind "organic" is that it is also possible to have "synthetic" churches that are not "naturally grown" by the Spirit of God-something we all want to avoid.

There are, however, several legitimate concerns over making "organics" a criterion for evaluating the worthiness of our churches. To begin with, the word is extra-biblical. It can't be found anywhere in the entire Bible-Old or New Testaments. Secondly, the word has not been adequately defined. My concept of an "organic church" may not be the same as your concept. What if people attach meanings to the word that contradict Scripture? That could allow confusion and error to creep in.

Using an extra-biblical word like "organic" has dangers similar to using an extra-biblical word like "Trinity." For instance, most of us have been told that a good illustration of the Trinity is the fact that a man can be a father, a son, and a grandfather all at the same time. That sounds very nice, but it actually contradicts scripture and promotes the heresy known as Modalism or Sabellianism. If Jesus and the Father are the same person, then who did Jesus pray to in the garden of Gethsemane? We can avoid the dangers associated with extra-biblical words by observing this simple guideline: Shape doctrine to Scripture, not Scripture to doctrine.

Since it looks as though the word "organic" is going to be around for a while, it would have been nice if we had circumvented the dangers associated with the use of this word by attaching Biblical meanings to it from the start. Unfortunately, we're a little late. There are already groups attaching meanings to this word that are subtly unbiblical.

For instance, some have said that "Organic churches are churches that form spontaneously." I know someone who, together with his friends, wanted to start a church. They met together on a regular basis for months. But because they wanted their church to be "organic," they didn't talk about the Bible much. Instead, they talked about sports, the news, their children, etc. Why? They were waiting for "it" to happen spontaneously.

In the book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit wanted to start more new churches, He told the church at Antioch: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the *work* to which I have called them" (Ac 13:2). Did Barnabas and Saul sit around and wait for things to happen? No, God used them to *make* things happen. How do we know this? Because He called them to "work"! Work involves *purposefulness* and *intentionality*.

Likewise, think of Heb 10:25: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching." If God has commanded us to encourage one another when we meet, we must not sit around and wait for it "to happen"-*"it"* will happen if we just obey Him and act! And yes, God Himself will be the one making it happen through us. Organic churches don't just happen-they are formed by God using men working

in obedience to Him.

Other "organic" enthusiasts feel that, "If you form a church be closely following the Bible and trying to imitate the patterns of the NT church, you'll end up with an outward form with no inward life. Just seek Jesus, and *He* will form the church, organically." The problem with this is that it sets up a false dichotomy-either you obey the Bible and follow NT patterns, or you seek Jesus. Now wait a second! Who says you can't do both? In fact, you should do both! Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (Jn 14:15).

This means being attentive to the voice of the Lord where He has *not* spoken in Scripture, and obeying Him where He has *already* spoken. We should not wait for Him to repeat to us afresh what He has already commanded before we will obey it. That reflects a misunderstanding of being "organic."

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Phillipians: "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you" (Php 3:17). And to the Thessalonians he wrote: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether my word, or our epistle" (2 Th 2:15, KJV). Obviously, then, we *should* imitate the traditions of the apostles. For proper organic church growth to occur, we must love the Lord so much that we cherish every word that comes from His mouth, and, like beloved children, imitate the apostles He trained to teach us.

What is wrong with many concepts of an "organic" church? They seem to assume that being "organic" involves some sort of plant-like passivity. Perhaps this is because we normally use the word in connection with gardening. But the Lord does not describe His church as a member of the plant kingdom, but as a woman! And every young woman must be taught the word of God and how to obey it in order to grow up right. The church is no different: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:25-27).

Healthy organic church growth does not occur without instruction and obedience in the Word. Satan would love to trick us into divorcing loving God from loving His words. On the other hand, he would also like for us to substitute an understanding of how to do things according to Scripture for a close love walk with Jesus. This is the extremely important and legitimate warning that well-meaning friends have been trying to communicate. We should not let the fact that the message has occasionally been expressed in a confused way keep us from heeding it. Understanding, even deep understanding of the word of God, is not enough.

Perhaps we should close with a common *good* definition of what it means to be an organic church: An organic church is one that knows the Lord, obeys His written Words and follows the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Let's walk closely with Jesus. Along the way, He will often stop to teach us. Let's sit at His feet, looking at Him with true love and affection in our eyes, as we expectantly wait to hear each and every word that comes from His mouth!

- R.E.

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