

things go together... If you do not see the wrath of God when you look at the cross of Calvary's hill, it is very certain that you do not see the love of God either. It is there that you see the wrath of God revealed... It is only as you have some conception of the depth of his wrath that you will understand the depth of his love.¹²

Extract 9

There are many, many ways to build the... church of the tares... many ways. Behind which Satan is the real power. And it can be done very effectively. The church of the tares can be very effective, it can be big, and it can be enduring. The Gnostics did it, and it's still around. The Roman Catholics have done it, and it's still around. The liberals have done it, and it's still around. The cults have done it, and it's still around. The church of the tares is actually bigger than the church of the wheat. And today [some of] those who call themselves evangelicals are busy doing it.

And there's a long list of locations called churches where tares assemble in increasing numbers with a scattering of weak wheat-stalks among them. The successful assemblies of tares will eagerly market their skill at tare development. It can be very seductive to those who are motivated by numbers or popularity.

So, if you want to take a shot at competing with the rest of the tare pastors to see how many tares you can get in a building, there's ample information, lots of seminars, plenty of books and data on the Internet that you can draw down to work on building your church of the tares with a smattering of wheat... How does Christ build his church and has he revealed [the answer] to us? Or are we in the dark? Is there some wiggle room here that allows for some of the contemporary approaches to this?

Well I'm happy to say to you, the answer is not vague, the answer is not obscure. When you ask how does Christ build his church, the answer is not debatable, it's not complicated, it's not even difficult. It is simple, it is straightforward, it is so clear that it is inescapable. It is so

¹² D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*.

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singular as to make every one of us duty-bound and accountable to the Lord of the church for faithfulness to his will and his means so clearly revealed. If you are caught up a little in chasing every passing fad for church growth, if you are buying the bags of church-growth stuff that clever entrepreneurs and marketers are selling, if you're reading every survey that comes out, and doing your best to analyse culture, you're trying every device to increase numbers, I sort of want to throw the gauntlet down today and ask you to make a choice. If you want to build the church of the tares, you're on your own, get all you can. [But if] you want to be a means by which Christ builds his church, that's a different thing all together...

The apostles went out with absolute disdain for – here comes the buzz word – any 'contextualisation' at all. The modern cry for 'contextualisation' is a curse...

The Lord built his church with pure, simple, straightforward gospel truth. The Corinthians, of course, they were very bothered that Paul wasn't contextualised. That ate at them [that is, it annoyed them]. And he couldn't have cared less. He didn't care at all. John the Baptist was a little out of touch with his society. I don't think he found a whole lot of folks wearing camel's hair. So were all the Old Testament prophets [a little out of touch with their culture] for that matter. And so was Jesus. And please, do not appeal to anything in people that is innate to their fallen-ness. Wherever their corruption goes, don't go there... don't go there. The true gospel has to be alien, it has to be alien...

Is it too obvious to say that the church of Jesus Christ is an assembly of true believers? To call an assembly of non-believers a church is preposterous, outrageous. The Lord only adds believers to the church. There's a serious defect in [being] proud of assembling non-believers, and calling them a church. Something deeply wrong there. Modern evangelicalism seems to exhaust every imaginable – and unimaginable – means to attract and collect non-Christians into a building, and then call it a church, and call it church growth. Maybe there's a better way to identify these places; let's just call them non-churches. Maybe it's just an evangelistic event...

In the early church, it was about a regenerate congregation...

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The Lord defines his church as an assembly of regenerate believers, totally devoted to Christ, true worshippers gathered for spiritual purposes, engaged in the spiritual disciplines. I love this, they were continually devoting themselves – ‘continually’ being the operative word – to these spiritual disciplines. This is a far cry from what goes on in the non-church today. An event is designed for unbelievers, and there are a few straggler-believers in the assembly of tares getting nothing to lift them up from their spiritual weakness. But the Lord builds his church from the foundation of true believers...

The church does not, as its primary objective, seek to be popular with the world. Would you agree with that? Obviously! Jesus said that they’re going to kill you because they killed me. They’re going to hate you. Get ready for persecution. In the Olivet discourse that he gave [in] Luke 21, he talks about this persecution that’s going to run between his first coming and his second coming. And it’s going to escalate and escalate and escalate; that’s just the way it’s going to be. He reiterates that in John 15 and 16. And so we understand that all who live godly in this present age will suffer persecution. We understand that.

But there’s a balance with that as well. It’s an interesting thing. The church does not seek to be popular with the world. It knows that in its true expression, it offends sinners – right? The essence of our message offends sinners. But it is also true that the world can have a basic respect for Christians. We find that. [In] Acts 2:46 [we read of the believers] ‘having favour with all the people’. The people could appreciate integrity. They could appreciate honesty. They could appreciate virtue. They could appreciate kindness and the graciousness that goes along with being a Christian...

But alongside that while they respect us for the evident power in our lives or the evident difference in our lives, they resent us for the message. They resent us for the message. The resentment comes at the point of the truth preached and proclaimed.

So, in the modern strategy you go big with the number-one idea that they like us because we’re nice, and if you just pull back the message, they’ll keep liking us. But if you’re honest enough to give the message, the message is a damning and judgmental message. And so it was in the

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book of Acts 2:36: 'Therefore, let all the house of Israel', says Peter: 'know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus, whom you crucified'. When they said: 'What shall we do?', Peter said (in verse 38): 'Repent and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'. And then (in verse 40) he goes on solemnly testifying and exhorting: 'Be saved from this perverse generation'. 'Don't go to hell with everybody else'. And he's talking to religious Jews. He's talking to religious Jews. [In] chapter 3 verse 17, Peter again: 'Now, brethren, I know you acted in ignorance just as your rulers did also, but the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ should suffer, he has thus fulfilled. Repent therefore and return that your sins may be wiped away in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and he may send Jesus the Christ appointed for you'. Again the message clearly is repentance. And it's the same again in chapter 4: 'Let it be known to you, and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by this name this man stands here before you in good health'. Again there is this continual tone of indictment. The same in chapter 5 verses 17 and following. You can read it on your own.

So the picture that emerges here is this: there is necessary a kind of integrity and personal virtue that's manifest in the life of the church in the world. But the message when preached faithfully and honestly and directly is rejected. It is hostile. It is offensive...

We can't back away from the idea of sin, righteousness, judgment, calling for repentance, forgiveness, escape from hell, not perishing with the perverse generation. This is an offensive, narrow, exclusive, condemning message. It puts all those – listen – all those who do not believe the gospel, into the category of being damned forever. And all people who propagate any other kind of religious idea except the true gospel are hypocritical, liars, who are damned themselves. There's no way around it. We are called to alarm the sinner... to alarm the sinner.

And what's that going to do? That's going to create persecution, hostility. Jesus said, you're going to have to

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take up your cross if you want to follow me, you're going to have to hate your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, those of your own household, even your own life. This message is very hostile. And the early church felt it big...

We want to be popular. We want to be accepted with everyone. We want to be accepted not only with the neutral people, we want to be accepted with all the other religious people... We want everybody to like us so that this [hatred of us] doesn't happen because this [hatred] is counterproductive to [our view of] evangelism.

Look: it's tough enough to get them to believe something that is foolish or a stumbling block. It's tough enough to tell them they have to be slaves to Christ in a world filled with slaves where they can see the abuses of that, and what it [has] meant. And then you add to that that if you do believe and become a part of the church, you might be arrested, put in jail, and executed [see Acts 4]. That's not going to work... [that's what we think]...

The big threat to the early church – this will surprise you – it wasn't persecution; we just read that. They arrested them [that is the apostles], and the church grew. They arrested them, and the church multiplied. That wasn't it [that is, persecution wasn't the biggest threat]. The biggest threat to the church was this: there were so many signs and wonders, there were so many miracles attracting people that unbelievers might come to church for the wrong reasons.¹³ That's the deadly danger. There were a lot of sick people, lots of people who were infirm, diseased, disabled. [The danger was when people started saying such things as:] 'Miracles [are] going on in there. Signs and wonders [are] going on in there. Listen, this is beyond a light show [that is, a spectacle of coloured lights that move and change, especially at a pop concert]. This is beyond a rock band. This is beyond a skit or a drama. This is the real deal'... [The real] fear in the church was that unbelievers would come in – and they already knew that the Lord said that the devil would sow tares. The church was in danger of being leavened by the world. So the wonder of it all had to be mitigated with fear. In fact, the fear had to be so powerful and so great that it stopped non-Christians

¹³ Compare John 6:26-59.

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outside the door. This is absolutely upside down from modern church-growth strategy... But [in the New Testament] there had to become such a deadly dread and fear [so great] that unbelievers [just] wouldn't dare go in to the church...

[From Acts 5:13, we learn the reaction of the people:] 'Don't go there, you might die'. That's a far cry from: 'Let's go there, it's fun'...

Church is not about being a jokester, it's not about funny, clever pop jargon...

It's so interesting to me to watch the flow of church growth. It starts out with sort of meeting people at their social level. They need associations, friends, singles need to meet singles, let's have restaurants for them, let's have recreation. That's the first wave that connects with them socially.

The second wave goes a little deeper and says: 'No, they've got all these felt needs; you've got to have 45 Twelve-Step Programs, so let's connect psychologically'. So the new wave of church growth says: 'Let's connect [with them] psychologically'.¹⁴

Extract 10

Another great evil is *the want of decision for the truth among truly good men*; those who are our brethren in the faith of our Lord Jesus, but who do not seem to have made up their minds as to separation from error. Good, easy men, they are all for peace! 'Sitting on the fence' seems to be a popular position among professors just now... Several brethren may have made up their minds; but, [waiting], they will sit uneasily upon the fence... There is a position which I never was able to occupy myself, and therefore I have no very profound sympathy with them. One or two learned divines are trying their utmost to get down on both sides of the fence; but it is a perilous experiment. Some are trying to get down on the winning side, and others would prefer to keep their judicious position world without end. Neutrals, in the end, have the respect of neither party; and, assuredly, they are *the difficulty* in every controversy.

¹⁴ John MacArthur: 'A Biblical Response to the Church-Growth Movement'.