

## **False Prophets Give Us A Man To Follow**

I will never forget the day my dream died. I had just completed my seminary master's degree in Church ministry.

My prior business experiences led me to the Church growth movement. Fascinated with its similarities to business, I read the latest research on the successes of the movement. I had found my niche.

The Church growth movement became the pattern for Christian congregations in this era. What began as an experiment by Bill Hybels at the assembly that he started soon exploded in size.

As a result, pastors and leaders in Christianity flocked to him to learn the methods that he developed. His pattern mushroomed into a world-wide phenomenon.

Hardly a local Christian fellowship has avoided the influence of Bill Hybel's program. Some adopted it completely, while others applied parts of it.

No doubt you know of the Church growth pattern that he started. Maybe you attend a fellowship that follows its paradigm.

Even if the Christian assembly where you attend does not follow it and shuns it, you possess an awareness of it.

## **False Prophets Give Us A Man To Follow**

I confess that the Church growth movement attracted me. I began to study these methods and those that others modified. I chose the steps that I would follow to implement its strategies.

As I planned, a strange dilemma developed as I attempted to harmonize my Church growth discoveries with Scripture. The more I tried to merge them, the farther they moved apart.

At last I realized that rather than improve the Church, the Church growth beliefs foster false prophets in the Church.

In fact, they reminded me of the Old Testament Judge/Prophet Samuel.

### **Popular church growth secrets foster false prophets: give us a man to follow.**

Samuel's life began with his miraculous birth. His mother, Hannah, could not bear children. She prayed earnestly for a son, and God gave her Samuel.

At an early, tender age, she took him to the Temple. He grew up in the Temple under Eli the High Priest. He and his sons died in shame. (1 Samuel 8.1-9)

With an absence of leadership, the people of Israel cried for a king. Their circumstances provided a legitimate time to look for another leader.

But the comments of the people offer a glimpse into their real desires. They did not ask for a prophet. They did not ask for a Godly man.

Instead, they wanted a king, someone to go out and fight their battles. They wanted a leader who would wear a crown and dress in purple robes. They wanted a champion that would lead them as other neighboring, pagan kings in their day.

Throughout their history, God had sent Israel Godly leaders. When they lived in Egypt, He sent them Moses, who led them out of Egypt through the wilderness to the brink of the Promised Land.

Then, God replaced Moses with another godly man, Joshua. He led them in victorious battles to take possession of the Promised Land.

The time of the judges came after the death of Joshua. During that era, God raised judges to rule and defend the Israelites.

The book of Judges records many times that God lifted up judges, giving them unique abilities and strengths for the welfare and direction for Israel. God used them to bring the Children of Israel back to Him.

Then Samuel the prophet came to lead God's people. Samuel led Israel many years until Israel called for a king.

Samuel rehearsed to them what would happen, if they raised up for themselves a king. (1 Samuel 8.10-18) But, they turned aside from his warnings:

*“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.” (1 Samuel 8.19)*

Israel rejected Samuel’s warning. They did not want a Godly leader like those who had lead them in previous days.

They turned aside from choosing a man of God who would lead them to follow God to emulate the peoples around them.

They saw their neighboring nations that had kings. They wanted a king, too, just like them. They sought for a man to follow who would protect them and cause them to flourish.

### **Popular Church growth secrets foster false prophets: give the majority what they want**

Israel made its decision for a king based upon popularity. As you read the whole passage in 1 Samuel 7-9, mark the frequent references to “the people.”

En masse, the people of Israel came to Samuel and demanded a king. All the elders demanded a king. They represented the desires of the people.

The people rejected the counsel that God gave them through Samuel. The popularity of their demands justified their actions in their cry for a king. (1 Samuel 8.1-22)

### **Popular Church growth secrets foster false prophets: give us modern methods**

The Children of Israel cried, “We want a king.” Where did they get that idea? In their history, they had never had a king. They wanted to imitate the world around them.

They wanted a king just like all their neighboring nations. They sought someone who would fight their battles and solve their problems.

The Israelites saw how the world managed their affairs and preferred it to God’s way. (1 Samuel 8.19-20)

This long history of ungodly kings reveals the disaster that Israel brewed when they demanded a king.

## **Correlation**

These events from Israel’s history in the times of Samuel the prophet describe the professing Christian Church today, which follows a similar pattern.

### **Give us a man to follow**

As in the days of the fledgling nation of Israel, professing Christian congregations want a man to lead them.

In place of a godly man, it wants a “king” to fight its battles. The choice of a man brings sorrow and spiritual decline. Man does not rule by grace, mercy, or justice.

As Christian congregations have turned aside from seeking godly leaders. A new list of characteristics for their leaders show their drift away from choosing a Godly leader.

Now the Church growth methods demand a particular kind of leader to implement its methods.

Christian congregations now demand a counselor, a conciliator, and a good businessman with pizzazz and a personality to match.

Professing believers, influenced by the Church growth methods, no longer desire a man who communes with God.

Like the Children of Israel, Christian congregations today disregard godly men for its leaders, choosing rather a “king” to lead them.

### **Give the majority what they want**

Again, like Israel, the professing Christian Church believes that popularity equals God’s way.

In fact Church growth methods rely upon popular acceptance and approval by the congregation for their adoption and “success”.

In this movement, popularity equates to God's will.

A Church that I attended several years ago had a practice that describes this custom.

When it came time to select candidates for various Church leaders, they sought candidates from each of the adult Sunday School classes and groups within the Church.

They wanted to make sure that they had representatives from every group of people in the congregation.

Rather than selecting leaders based upon the Godliness of the candidates, they wanted to please every Church group, hoping to secure cooperation among the people.

Soon, this congregation followed the siren call of the Church growth movement.

Such practices produce wolves in sheep's clothing who lead the sheep astray. They give the people what they want.

The people are satisfied with such leaders and encourage them to assume positions of leadership in the Church.

That is not how Jesus the King governs His Body, the Church. It is an organism, nor an organization.

The Body of Christ does not need CEOs, champions, or powerful persuasive personalities as our leaders like the world and Church growth methods foster.

Christ's Church is not a democracy. His way is not decided by majority vote or by a committee gathered from various groups within a congregation.

The Christian Church has a King in charge, Jesus. He rules as Head of the Church, His body. We need to discern what King Jesus wants to do, not what the people want to do.

The Church needs leaders filled with the Holy Spirit, ones who spend time calling upon God and seeking the face of Christ, because it sometimes takes time to discern Christ's will for His Body.

When that kind of leader stands before the Church and says, "This is the way. Walk ye in it," the congregation can trust their Godly leaders.

### **Give us modern methods**

At the risk of repetition, that describes the Christian congregations today. Its leaders try to exceed one another in their pursuit of discovering the world's latest methods and incorporating them into the activities of their local congregations.

They want to follow the world's practices. I have heard Christian congregational leaders discuss the world's methods and how to adopt them.

They assume that if it works for big business, it must work for the Church. In its practices, the Christian congregation incorporates the methods of the world as its formulas for growth.

In fact, the Church emulates the world to such an extent it looks and acts just like the world.

Like the Children of Israel, the professing believers today want to fit in and appease the world. We have believed the error that to win the world we must look and act like the world.

God does not work that way. The Scriptures tell us to come out from among the world and be separate. (2 Corinthians 6.17)

Scripture never encourages believers to copy the world to find out how to live as Christians.

Further, Scripture never encourages believers to compromise with the world in order to win the world. The Church stands against the world and exposes its darkness.

Believers should walk as children of light, not as children of darkness.

## **Implications**

These truths, demonstrated in Israel's cry for a king, suggest serious implications for the Body of Christ today. The Apostle John issued a serious comment regarding the relationship between God and the world.

He said,

*"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* (1 John 2.15)

Church leaders and pastors ignore this warning by pursuing the world's methods and manners while at the same time trying to receive God's blessing over their plans.

To love the world's methods and practices, and to continue to pursue them and their adoption, casts doubt

upon the activities of these leaders.

It calls into question the true nature and existence of their love for God.

Jesus warned that you cannot serve two masters. He will have no competitors in the operation of His Body. Scripture warns us of the true nature of the world:

*“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.”* (1 John 2.16-17)

James in his epistle described the distinction between earthly, sensual, devilish wisdom and God’s wisdom. He began the passage with these words:

*“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.”* (James 3.13)

He then described worldly wisdom, after which he concluded:

*“This wisdom (worldly wisdom) descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.”* (James 3.16)

After he described worldly wisdom, James listed the qualities of the wisdom that God sends.

At the very top of the list, he identified purity, which literally means that purity is the number one characteristic of God’s wisdom.

Purity does not deceive. Purity does not a lie, nor conflict with Scripture. Purity is truthful, and honest.

The world’s wisdom differs from God’s wisdom. We need to recognize and pursue God’s wisdom.

The Christian congregation must heed God’s wisdom. By so doing, we will reject the plans and purposes of the false prophets today, who pursue and promote the world’s methods and wisdom through their adoption into Church growth methods.

Scripture tells us that God will not share His glory with another. As you read Scripture, you will find repeatedly that God always does things in such a way that only one person will receive the honor and the glory, God.

In Zechariah 4, we read God’s message to Zerubbabel, who faced a difficult challenge. God assured him,

*“This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”* (Zechariah 4.6)

When Jesus the Head of the Body wants to accomplish something, including growth, He will do it by the power of His Holy Spirit.

This example of the Children of Israel provides sobering insight into the circumstances that foster the rise of false prophets and leaders.

We erroneously think the crowd must be right. We imagine that so many people cannot be wrong. Yet, might does not necessarily make right. The paths that seem right lead to destruction.

The Scriptures say that God perfects His strength in human weakness. (2 Corinthians 12.9) His strength does not come alongside man’s strength.

We experience the fullness of God’s strength, power, and ability in utter human helplessness and weakness.

The state of the Christian Church requires this kind of Godly leaders.

I pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see the truth, draw you into the truth, and encourage and strengthen you with it.

I pray that you will walk as a child of light and not as a child of darkness.

## **Questions For Reflection and Application**

01. What “kingly” attributes does the Church see in a new pastor?
02. What kinds of activities lead us to love the world?
03. How does the world’s wisdom differ from God’s wisdom?
  - a) In Education?
  - b) In Marriage?
  - c) In Politics?
  - d) In the Church?
04. How does the Church receive the message from Jesus, the Head of the Church, regarding His wisdom?
05. How does Christ communicate His will to His Church?
06. List warning signs that a Church has acquired a king instead of a shepherd as pastor.

*Father, thank You for this setting of the people crying to Samuel for a king. It so clearly illustrates to us the forces that we see at work within those who profess to be followers of Christ today. They serve to us as a clear warning: That is not Your way. That is not how You do things.*

*Therefore, we can eliminate and reject those temptations, urgings, and promptings that we may have and pursue after You and permit You to reign over us as king.*

*Teach us, Father, by Your Spirit, how to follow the King, how to hear His voice through Your Spirit, how to tell the difference, how to discern the truth.*

*There are so many voices today. Help us to hear Your voice and to follow it.*

*Father, we want to honor and glorify Your name in all that we do.*

*We will give You praise, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for what You accomplish in our lives to the glory of the Father and of his Son and of Your Holy Spirit.*

*Amen.*