

MTO Church Life

We believe the Bible teaches that righteousness and peace in church life must be a working reality, not merely a distant, unattainable goal. The Bible also calls the Church to be a healthy, properly functioning body, not a sick or broken one (1Cor 12). We find these requirements sadly lacking at times among conservative Christians. One worldly, sinful culprit responsible for the chaos in many churches is the MTO church mentality.

The made-to-order church life mentality is believing that church life or congregational life must be just as I want it. This means I am happy if decisions in church life are made as I like. It also means I am happy if all functions of the church meet my approval. It means I am unhappy if my expectations in church life are not realized, and will attempt nearly anything to realize my wishes.

It seems most Christians are aware of the need of completely surrendering and trusting God in material, health, and other everyday-life areas. However, in religious realms many seem to lack faith to do so. Our Anabaptist forefathers rightfully initiated a church life and structure according to God's standard because of the heresy polluting Roman Catholicism. It was not because of an MTO church life mentality. Today in many cases of division we hide under a cloak of righteousness, pointing out the faith of our forefathers even when that faith is somewhat lacking in our own experience. Where is the sacrificial, longsuffering, gentle, forgiving, humble virtue that is commanded in God's Word? Many times what we count as conviction is really an opinion when examined under the glorious spotlight of God's Word. It is easier than we think to abuse scripture by supporting our opinion with a loosely connected Bible principle.

While all of us face disappointments in church life, it is our response to these occasions that declare whether or not we will allow a godly spirit to reign. Am I committed to this lofty, personal calling? Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation [motives] of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." It is by obeying the Biblical command to try the spirits that we can determine the spirit of our mentality. Let us further examine this spirit of MTO church life.

Where does it originate? Satan had this mentality. He was dissatisfied with the authority of heaven to the point He rebelled against God. Scripture tells us there was war in heaven, and Satan and His angels were cast out. Why was Satan frustrated with the authority structure of heaven? It was because He wanted heaven's authority to be MTO for him. From this we learn that even under perfect conditions, there will be those whose personal desires cause them to defect. We also learn that

the desire to displace God-chosen leadership often comes from a rebellious heart that lusts to be the one in control.

Why do many succumb to this MTO mentality? The real reason is that humans are born with a sin nature. The Bible teaches this. Even after conversion, Satan through temptation continues to seduce unwary Christians back into their native bent, sin. First John 2:16 details for us the MTO mentality, which is worldliness. The three spiritually tragic mentalities here are, “I desire,” “I deserve,” and “I determine.” These mentalities appeal to our native bent.

Also, we live in a society that is immersed in this ideology, and it rubs off on us. For example, it is as simple as the convenience stores offering sandwiches just how you want them—made to order! It can be realized in restaurants. By simply complaining about your meal you can most times get another platter, whether the steak, chicken, or fries were not done right, or were too cold, too tough, too sour, etc. Consider the return policies of most stores: buy a product and later return it, no questions asked.

This mentality is as complex and sinful as the immoral tolerance of our world. Many men and women no longer honor God by marrying. Instead they cohabit. Some even join in ungodly same-gender unions. All this and more is an MTO life mentality, “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (Eph 2:3). As a result, our society is largely a pampered, spoiled, sinful, hard-to-please people, which tends to influence how we think about church life.

A concern that soon arises when discussing this subject is the danger of submitting and blindly following leadership or a church group into apostasy. We must realize this as a real danger. We appreciate previous generations for standing for truth while so many followed the “church” in a downward spiral. While we still battle with the very aged damnable dangers of liberalism, worldliness, and drift in clothing and lifestyle, etc., we also battle the perhaps more subtle dangers of Pharisaism, which afflict the heart and are also damnable. One chief concern in present church life is pride, which defines itself many times by insubordination to the authority structure in a given church group.

This insubordination in the MTO church life mentality has varied faces; however, one common thread that runs throughout is a loudly proclaimed spiritual concern, call, or vision, with generally the concerned persons being convinced of their own spiritual superiority. The next step is to gain support for the “vision,” which of itself is not wrong perhaps. However, in cases of insubordination the support is often gained by speaking evil of others and “sowing discord among brethren.” The MTO mentality drives even further in causing those concerned to dishonor the God-placed authorities by running over them, like the people in Numbers 14 who wanted to stone Moses and Aaron and choose their own captain. Lastly, the concerned party is convinced they are qualified to create something for church life and structure that is

just right, made to order! So more factions, in-groups, fellowships, conferences, and house churches are formed, each warring for the MTO church life. This can also be an Ephesians 2:3 situation (fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind), although it wears a lovely spiritual face.

What is a proper response to disappointments and concerns in church life? Following are five practical points that we believe are of Biblical precedent.

1. Respectfully appeal to the proper authority. Whether we are of the laity or of the ordained, there is an authority structure that is to be honored for God's sake. The lay brother may appeal to his minister or deacon. The minister or deacon may appeal to the local team or to his bishop. Likewise, the bishop may appeal to his fellow bishops (1Pet 2:17; 3John 9-11).
2. In the Christian church, in the event our appeal is not honored, we must quietly submit to the authority over us (Heb 13:17; 1Pet 5:5).
3. We should pray fervently. Earnest prayer to God through the precious name of Jesus changes things. Have our actions proven that we believe this? Do we have a vision? Pray! Do we have a burden? Pray! Do we have a concern? Pray! (James 5:16).
4. Be strong for God in the things that we are responsible for and that we may and can change. If we are a father or mother, we should be strong for our spouse and children. If we are a Sunday school teacher, we should teach truth. Often we think we are better qualified for the responsibilities we were NOT called to do. This is false (Psa 106:16; Matt 25:14-30).
5. If we truly believe the church we are a part of is departing from truth and we must leave, let's arm ourselves with every Christian virtue before doing so. Let's not feel we need to make a case before we leave. Many have bowed to the sins of self-righteousness and malice, marring their Christian testimony and becoming an offense by doing so (Gal 5:22-23; Luke 18:9-14).

Let us each humbly fill our place and follow the Lord's directives for building His Church. Then we can enjoy church life that is truly made to order—His order!

~Darvin Halteman