

The Church on the Corner

By Daryl Wingerd

They are everywhere. Some are picturesque brick or stone buildings with beautiful stained-glass windows. Others are white, wood-sided buildings with crosses on top of steeples. Many are big, but most are small. Some are in crowded cities, but most are in small towns.

A sign out front informs you what religious tradition the building represents. They advertise their planned events and sermon topics on a tidy marquis out front, or in the local newspaper. Often, bells ring to announce the beginning of their Sunday morning activities.

At a glance they appear to be alive with spiritual activity. Nicely dressed mothers and fathers walk in around 9:30 or 10:00, holding the hands of children dressed in their Sunday best. People from other walks of life also enter, from older couples conservatively dressed and walking arm-in-arm, to college-aged singles wearing flip-flops and shorts. You know many of these people from around town: businessmen, schoolteachers, farmers, and neighbors. Nice people.



Sometimes, while they are inside, you can hear the muted sound of an organ or piano. Depending on how thick the walls are, you might even hear the people singing or the sound of someone preaching if you walk by the building. An hour or two after it all starts, everyone walks out. Since the same people tend to repeat this activity at the same place week after week, it seems apparent that they consider their Sunday morning experience worthwhile and satisfying. But what really goes on inside?

Thankfully, inside many such buildings, Jesus Christ is worshipped and the Bible faithfully taught. His sacrifice for sinners is proclaimed as good news, and sinners are urged to repent and trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins. The believers in attendance pray together in humble dependency on God's Spirit and His grace. They exhort one another to trust their heavenly Father, persevere in the faith, and pursue holiness in obedience to Christ. Plans are made for taking the good news to unsaved friends and neighbors, as well as to people in foreign lands—people who are ensnared in the deceit of worldliness or false religion, and who are currently without hope. In other words, inside many church buildings on many corners, true Christianity is taught, and practiced, and defended.

But beware! You cannot be certain by looking at the outside of the building, or even at the posted advertisement, that the right things are happening. If you were to walk inside many of these establishments on a Sunday morning, you would actually witness the practice of a false, anti-Christian religion. And no, I'm not referring to Islam, Mormonism, Christian Science, or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Consider one recent Sunday morning experience inside a quaint brick church building owned and operated by a group claiming to represent the mainstream Christian tradition. As an introduction, those in attendance were informed that "right belief" is not as important as "right actions." Then, the pastor spent at least half of her twenty-minute sermon, entitled "Finding the Way," assuring everyone that Jesus didn't really say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This saying, she claimed, was mistakenly attributed to Jesus by misguided disciples years after His death, as were numerous other statements and actions recorded in John's gospel. She criticized people who use John 14:6 and other "clobber passages" (as she called them) in the Bible to mislead people into believing there is only one way to heaven. Jesus, she said, never would have made exclusive statements like this because, as everyone knows, "He was radically inclusive." She finished her polished presentation by assuring everyone that whatever "path of faith" they happened to be on, all were "beloved children of God" with a place reserved for them in heaven.

None of the other listeners seemed even the slightest bit concerned about what she was saying. They soaked in her message, even though it came straight from "the father of lies" (the name Jesus really did call Satan, as recorded in John 8:44). Then they all went home. Though they *felt* satisfied when they left, they were worse for having been there.

Most alarming is the fact that this was not an isolated event. This same false anti-truth religion is the common practice, on any given Sunday morning, inside friendly looking church buildings all across America.

So what kind of church building draws your attention on Sunday mornings? Before you walk inside, remember that like the Jewish Pharisees of Jesus' time, church buildings bearing the name "Christian" are all-too-often "like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27).

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