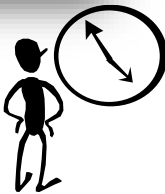


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(every other week)

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

The Sin of Small Churches

By Mike Thomas

It is not uncommon for people to measure a church's success solely by the numbers it has in attendance. One of the first things I am asked when people learn I am a preacher is how big the church is where I attend. They will then use this as a benchmark for whether or not I am a successful preacher or if the church is a vibrant congregation. I guess I do the same thing when asking about others. For one reason or another, we are led to believe that all we need to know about a church is found in its numbers. This perception leads some Christians to ask, "Have we failed because we cannot get more people to join our effort? Are we doing something wrong when the numbers are low?" Many are convinced that churches will not remain small if they are truly dedicated to the Lord.

The church at Sardis had a reputation as a growing and active church, but from God's perspective they were dead spiritually (Revelation 3:1). Perhaps their pews were filled to capacity and everybody who was anybody went there; with other churches in the area measuring their efforts by what Sardis did. But Sardis was not the ideal church from God's point of view. When it came to serving God, Sardis had a lot to learn from Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) and Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) in demonstrating faith and zeal. This does not mean that every large church has compromised with sin to get to that size (Acts 11:21). Nor does it mean that fewer numbers guarantee faithful, dedicated members. Some churches are few in number because they will not commit to a spiritual atmosphere that encourages love and dedication to God; forcing others to look elsewhere out of self-preservation. Some are overflowing with people despite the teaching and leadership. As long as a church is dedicated to the Lord's will, they should not feel like a failure when the numbers are not booming as in other churches. Sometimes the most dedicated disciples can

find only a few to join them in serving God properly, as Noah discovered in preparing for the flood (I Peter 3:20).

A church with few numbers can still have a very positive, uplifting, and encouraging atmosphere if it is willing. One of the finest churches I know of has attendance in the 20s to 30s every week. The world looks at numbers like that and says it's time to close the doors and go elsewhere to worship, but don't tell these brethren that. They are genuinely committed to worshipping God in spirit and truth - with no thought whatsoever of self-pity and disappointment. Their time in worship is deliberate and unhurried. Their singing is plentiful and with purpose. Their preaching (the kind they demand from visiting speakers) is straight out of the Bible. Any time they have together is time to let each other know how much they genuinely appreciate one another. They even keep the building up-to-date and clean. It's hard to believe a church like that will stay small for long, but then again that's measuring success in ways God does not.

In any setting and in all things may the attitude always be "*not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*" (Romans 12:11). There is always a reason to rejoice since Jesus promises that "*where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:20).

Flippancy Toward Reproduction

By Andy Diestelkamp

Undoubtedly the invention of the birth control pill fueled "the sexual revolution." The prospect of sexual experience without "consequences" gave women what some men imagined that they already "enjoyed" - **freedom!** Freedom from responsibilities and the burdens that come with them.

Yet, this stereotypical flippant male mentality which imagines personal freedom from the "consequences" of sex was generally the worldview of the unmarried and unbelievers. A good man, a godly man does not have such an attitude toward sexual reproduction. He marries before he engages in that which our Creator designed to produce babies and views himself as the protector of and provider for and full partner with his wife in the fruits of their union.

Whereas, when those pursuing sexual freedom without inhibition find themselves with the fruit of their freedom, they too often resort to sacrificing their offspring on the altar of their freedom. When people's sexual freedom inevitably resulted in a host of unwanted threats to their freedom, abortion became an essential right to maintain that freedom. With relative flippancy, the fruit of sexual revolutionaries became disposable with no concern whatsoever for the freedoms of their offspring. The sexual revolution produced a flippancy toward sex itself **and** its natural fruit. Sex essentially became, to many, like food satisfying an appetite, with its "consequences" being flushed down the toilet.

But wait, there's more! Technology has brought us in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and the rich and glamorous have seen its advantages and convenience. Methods that might be ethically used on a **very** limited basis to help a married couple who is barren have a child, have become the playground of mercenary doctors and technicians pandering to everyone from the desperate to the social elite to create human embryos en masse to sit on ice. Paris Hilton flippantly observed in an interview with Glamour Magazine (UK), "Carter [her husband] and I had already been talking about the future and then the world was shut down [by Covid], so I was like, 'What do you think about us making embryos?' And he said, 'Yeah, let's do it.' And we've done it seven times... I have all boys. I have 20 boys."

However, do not misunderstand or be distracted by my specific example. This is not a rant against Paris Hilton. She likely doesn't know any better. It is a warning to those who espouse a worldview with Christ at its center to beware that the flippancy of the world toward sexual reproduction does not in any way influence our way of thinking about God's gifts to us. "Making embryos" is a holy endeavor and to flippantly flush them down the toilet or stock a freezer with them is not only unethical, but it is also immoral, and to endorse it is blasphemy.

Evolution's Missing Fossils

By Jon Gary Williams

The idea of an evolving scale of life has been around for more than two thousand years -- from the time of Thales, Anaximander, and Empedocles. Yet it was not until the days of Charles Darwin that the idea began to take on any essence of science. Men such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Herbert Spencer laid the groundwork for this theory, but it was Darwin who was given credit for announcing it to the world.

Until the mid-19th century, practically all men of science were creationists. However, with the rise of the so-called "age of reason," when intellectualism and natural philosophy were becoming popular, the time was right for the idea of organic evolution to be received.

Darwin's concept of evolution was summarized thusly: Millions of years ago lifeless matter, acted upon by natural forces, gave rise to minute living organisms, and from this, over time, all forms of life emerged.

Crucial to Darwin's theory was that extremely long periods of time were required. Time was a key factor. Darwin reasoned that for all the earth's expansive forms of life to have evolved, multiplied millions upon millions of years were necessary. This slow process of evolving life eventually came to be known by Darwin's namesake - Darwinism.

Also crucial to his theory was the notion that during these eons of time fossils of

many millions of intermediate life, forms would be deposited into the earth's geologic strata. Though Darwin failed to locate any such fossils, he reasoned that the fossil record was merely "incomplete," and that in time these fossils would be discovered. So, through the years men scoured the earth searching for fossils showing links between the different species of life.

At times claims were made that "missing links" had been found. One classic example is the archeopteryx, which was claimed to be a link between reptiles and birds. However, it was later proven to be nothing more than an extinct bird. There were no fossils to support Darwinism, but since the theory required them, promoters of evolution continued to leave the impression that they did indeed exist. After all, this was the only place to find hard evidence for evolution.

The time came, however, when several well-known evolutionists began emphasizing the lack of transitional fossils. After all, if all life did evolve there should be millions of such fossils to confirm it, but there were none. The question remained: why were there none? So, instead of questioning the idea of evolution itself, some began proposing a radical solution to the problem. Evolutionists could not abandon evolution, for this would leave the only alternative concept -- special creation, but that conclusion was not acceptable in the minds of these men. They claimed that evolution did not happen slowly, but rather that the changes between different species occurred suddenly, thus leaving no long trail of intermediate fossils.

One of the first men to reject the gradual, Darwinian concept was G. G. Simpson. In the 1950s he taught that due to the lack of intermediate fossils, evolution could not have happened slowly, but rather by sudden "leaps." He was criticized and tagged with the "sudden leap" theory. Then, in the 1960s the esteemed Richard Goldschmidt also rejected Darwinism and promoted a rapid-type evolution. He too was chastised and labeled with what was called the "hopeful monster" theory.

By the 1970s the trend to doubt gradual Darwinism was expanding. The lack of intermediate fossils was so obvious it could no longer be ignored; it was impossible to defend this type of evolution. In their attempt to salvage any belief in evolution, three leading evolutionists, Steve J. Gould, Niles Eldridge, and Derek Ager, following the lead of Simpson and Goldschmidt, published their view of a rapid-type evolution. They labeled it Punctuated Equilibrium, which is now the accepted view of practically all evolutionists.

What is Punctuated Equilibrium? To put it simply, this means that forms of life suddenly evolved into different forms. "Equilibrium" means that which remains uniform (without change) over long periods of time. "Punctuated" refers to a sudden interruption in that uniform state, creating something new and different. Life forms continue in a steady, uniform state for long periods. Then at times, abrupt, punctuated changes take place and new life forms appear -- it is the process by which one species rapidly ex-

plodes into a new, distinct species rather than gradually transforming into another species.

Supposedly, this theory removes the Darwinian problem of why there is no trail of transitional fossils. Rather than evolution happening slowly over eons of time, the claim is that it happened rapidly at different punctuated moments. The claim is that these changes occur so swiftly over such short periods of time that fossils do not accumulate. (Note: Some say these punctuated periods of time may be only 50,000 to 100,000 years. Not much time for millions upon millions of transitions to take place.)

Promoters of the punctuated equilibrium theory believe this explains how evolution must have happened; it was a convenient way to deal with the lack of transitional fossils. However, this view is even more preposterous than the original Darwinian theory. In either case, transitional fossils are missing. Why? Simply because they never existed.

The Contagion of Emotions

By Terry Wane Benton

At Ephesus, there was a stirring of emotions causing the idolatrous people to start a long series of chants and emotional outbursts of "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*" (Acts 19:34). This constant chant went on for two hours. There was a contagion of emotions, and perhaps the fervor for Diana had a "revival" in that city for a while.

Emotions can be contagious and spread quickly, but the emotions are not proof of "truth" and they are not proof of "the pouring out of the Holy Spirit" or of "the Spirit moving." It is only proof of the moving of human spirits into emotional hype. Attributing emotional displays to the "moving of the Holy Spirit" is easy to imagine, but it is not proof of the Holy Spirit at all. It is merely proof that emotions can get contagious.

If every time a group of people got emotional and began to chant something, we assumed it was "the moving of the Holy Spirit," then the Holy Spirit would be confirming every wind of doctrine taught in all those places. Charismatics of every variety, have the same emotional hype. It was emotional hype that led Joseph Smith to imagine angels and spirit guidance. Emotional hype led 900 people to follow Jim Jones to their death. Can we truly call every emotionally hyped situation the "moving of the Holy Spirit?"

I would call attention to what the Holy Spirit really shows us in the Bible. He never "moved" in that manner. In fact, the real Holy Spirit called for controlling your emotions and presenting His word with order and reason (I Corinthians 14:30-40). If emotions go uncontrolled and there is shouting at random, you can look at what the Holy Spirit said right here and know for certain that this emotional hype is definitely not anything attributable to the Holy Spirit.

Maybe we should think about deceptive spirits cashing in on emotional contagion. If not, why not?