


DO WE WANT A CHURCH THAT FLIES?

by Tom Wacaster



A rather interesting article appeared in one of the more liberal periodicals sometime back that deserves an open and honest investigation. The author's comments serve as a good example of the present effort on the part of change agents to remodel and restructure the Lord's church of our generation into something that is "functional," though not necessarily in accord with the "form" of the New Testament pattern. The author of that article draws a parallel between the progress in aviation and the supposed progress now being offered the brotherhood. He argues that our first attempts at flight failed because we sought to "imitate" the birds rather than develop the principle of flight. In like manner, he argues, we [those who would demand a 'thus saith the Lord'] have sought to imitate the first century church rather than build a church that is functional. He writes: "Like the ornithopterists of old, we assumed that 'function' was inextricably bound to 'form', that to fly with the first century church required us to fly like it. In our minds, a restoration of the first century spirit and dynamic would only be possible when we gave the modern church the same 'equipment' as its ancient counterpart...Many of us are growing frustrated with a modern church that may look like the ancient church in the particulars but fails to function with anything like its power and life-changing dynamic." Let us take a close look at our misguided brother's plea.

First, functionality and form cannot be separated when it comes to divine and holy matters. God so decreed that to be the case. In short, when God designed the church He designed it to function according to His purpose, and with "his good pleasure" in mind (Eph. 1:5). It makes no difference what generation we may live in, or what culture might surround us, truth remains truth and no man can add or successfully alter God's form without incurring God's wrath and displeasure. We need to remind ourselves that Galatians 1:8-9, Revelation 22:18-19 and 1 Corinthians 4:6 are still in the Bible.

Second, functionality is not to be defined by men. I find it interesting that the change agents have no clear definition of where they want to take the church. This is because they do not know themselves where they want to go. Many of them are like the pilot who told his passengers, "We are casting off the compass, and throwing out the radio, but we can rejoice in knowing that all engines are running and it is full speed ahead." The Bible provides a clear cut pattern for the church both in its identity and its purpose. Yes, there are minute details as to what the church should look like, but there are also plain and positive passages as to her purpose, and how that purpose is to be accomplished. If I read my Bible clear we are to preach and teach the lost, build up and edify the body of Christ, and provide assistance to those in need as the opportunity arises. God reminds us that if we will trust in Him, and build the church as He has instructed, it will function properly. The error among those who seek to change the church is that they do not trust in God's design. Some would have you believe that if you build it according to God's pattern, it will not fly! Two thousand years have proven otherwise. If it worked in the first century [and it did], what makes us think we can improve upon God's design?

Third, any problem or failure that might happen to arise lies not in the design of the craft that God has built, but the ones who might happen to be at the helm. Placed in capable hands, an airplane can and will operate properly. Pilot error is the cause of much of

aviation's mishaps. Likewise when God's church is placed in capable hands it will meet all of the divine specifications and it will operate properly and function at peak performance. If the church is not functioning as it should, blame is to be laid at the feet of elders who will not shepherd the flock as they should, preachers who will not preach the truth without fear and favor of men, and members whose lives are not in harmony with God's will.

One closing thought. The article to which I refer is a clear call to abandon that pattern set forth in God's word in exchange for something that is "functional." It is the age old argument that the end justifies the means. And so this misguided author concludes: "Central to this endeavor is a willingness to disconnect form from function, to assert that function is primary, and to suggest that it is possible to build a contemporary church that pleases God even if it does not look exactly like the church of the first or the nineteenth century." In the final analysis I prefer a church whose feet are on the ground, standing on the Rock of Ages, as opposed to one that would soar through the skies with no direction, no compass, and no certain destination.