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DENOMINATIONAL MATURITY

Yesterday we spoke of how church denominations start, grow, and mature, and essentially how they evolve over the years to become very rigid in their teachings and intolerant of anyone in their denomination whose views may differ.

I will use as an example, the denomination in which I grew up, since I know it best. It is a Pentecostal one that came about in the aftermath of the 1907 Azusa Street Revival. They were strong in the gifts of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 12). They were so sure that Jesus was imminently returning that they sent no missionaries into the field; many thought the rapture would occur before they could get missionaries trained. After a couple of decades, they realized they missed it, and they became one of the most missions-oriented churches in the nation. They were truly a "movement" for the first four to five decades. Their ministers were not seminary trained; they received their education directly from the study of their bible.

That all began to change in 1960 with the election of their new national church leader. He began focusing on pushing a formal ministerial education. Since the church had no seminaries of its' own, the ministers began studying at seminaries of non-Pentecostal groups. Everything changed during the 60's and 70's for this denomination. Exercise of the gifts of the Spirit, that had been so common before, began to wane.

Doctrinal positions on divorce and re-marriage changed. Teaching about Jesus' second coming, rapture, and the tribulation changed. Any minister that was part of this denomination who did not agree with the newly-defined positions (the "white papers") was stripped of all ministerial credentials. These changes came about in an apparent move to line up with popular religious views held by other denominations. This was seen as important to their growth in membership numbers since this was the peak of the "charismatic Renewal" that was bringing in tens of thousands of new "Charismatics" (Pentecostals) from these other denominations.

It is a case of "maturity" where the "wisdom of man" took precedent over what the Bible, God's own Word, taught. Unfortunately, Church people adopt whatever beliefs their Pastor or Church leaders teach them. For many, they have no desire to diligently search out the bible for themselves. If what the Preacher or Teacher gives them sounds like a "good case," they simply believe it and accept it.

How would you know what the scripture really says or means unless you search it out for yourself? I mean a honest and thoroughly diligent search, laying aside any teaching you "heard" so as not to prejudice your search and study.

Most Christians are "sheeple." Sheep follow their shepherd unquestioningly.

Sheep People → Sheeple. Many simply follow their Pastor/Shepherd or some other respected teacher.

We will see by example of my former denomination a couple of such "position changes" in teaching that runs through most of Christianity today. We start that tomorrow. Stay tuned.