

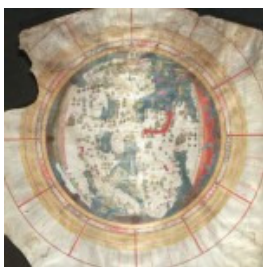
Leading Forward

The Inaccurate Map Gets You Lost



Recently, I looked online at a world map drawn by a Venetian map maker in 1452. While it was most interesting to study, it would be useless for

travel today. It presumed a flat world and included only the areas known as Europe, Asia, and Africa. The city of Jerusalem is located near the center of the map. The purpose of a map is to serve as a guide so that a person might follow the roads and typography on the map to reach his chosen destination. An old world map that doesn't have all of the continents on it or a city map that doesn't include all the local streets and roads are not useful guides. Instead, they could cause a person to become lost and fail to reach his chosen destination.



Maps are not the only guides that we use in our lives. Recipes are guides for preparing food. Blueprints are guides for constructing a house or a building. Just like an old map that can lead you astray, a missing ingredient from a recipe can result in a disappointing meal. Even worse, a mistake in a blueprint can lead to a building collapsing from faulty construction. The truth is that in every area of life we must rely upon an accurate, up-to-date guide.

As a new year begins, I am giving a great deal of thought to what guides the direction of churches and their ministries. We all would want to say that God is our guide through the work of the Holy Spirit. However, there are some indicators that some of the activities and actions of churches may be guided by personal preferences, time

-honor traditions, or the latest book on *How to Do Church*.

Everything about the work and ministry of a church has something that has shaped or guided the decisions it makes and the areas of ministry that it emphasizes. Churches determine the time and number of worship services they will conduct; the items in a budget and the amount of money allocated to each item; the way a pastor or staff members are called or hired; who can join the church; and how business meetings will be directed. The reason they do what they do in the way that they do it may have been the result of much prayer, the reading of Scripture, the influence of a pastor, the gift of an affluent member, or a denominational suggestion. As much as we don't want to admit it, we have followed many guides, some good and some faulty, in the shaping of our churches.

Let's be clear – old is not the issue here, but accuracy and effectiveness are. For instance, many churches are still using *"Come and Hear"* as the basis for reaching people. In the Bible, Jesus instructed us to *"Go and Tell."* Some churches follow the guide *"Me First"* when developing their church budget to ensure that the members are comfortable in their surroundings and with the programming. But Jesus gave emphasis to caring for the poor and ministering to those in need.

Numerous practices of the church began through practicality rather than biblically mandated directives. Sunday evening services began in earnest when the local church was often the first building in a frontier community to have electric lights. Covering the elements for communion with a cloth was designed to keep the flies off the bread

and cup in a church with open windows. Every generation of believers has had contemporary music as God gifted individuals to compose the message of the gospel in song. A building looks like a church only because we have a human conceived image in our minds of what a church should look like. Democracy in a church is more the result of our own nation's emphasis on democracy than it is a biblical principle.

Don't misunderstand - I am not trying to criticize the way anyone does church. I do, however, believe it is time for all churches to examine why they do what they do. Some human determinations or preferences work well in the church because the Bible does not cover everything about how you should do church. While the scriptures give qualities for pastors, the Bible doesn't cover the job descriptions for student ministers. The Bible does cover sharing the work load as in the case of Moses appointing leaders to help solve the problems people were facing during the exodus.

It is important that you know why you do things the way you do. If what you are doing doesn't fit with God's Word and His purposes, it is time to reconsider and change what you are doing. If what you are doing is not fulfilling God's mission for your church, it is time to pray and seek another approach or ministry that is in the will of God and does result in reaching the goal and destination that the Lord has for your church.

An inaccurate map can get you lost. A misdirected guide can cause you to be disoriented. Maybe that is why Jesus specifically used the words with His disciples - **follow me**. The Year 2012 is a great time to discard what is misdirected within our churches and do that which results in following Him.