



Pure Scum: The Left-Out, the Right-Brained and the Grace of God

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Scum of the Earth

As time went by, people from the Bible study became interested in attending our Presbyterian church service. They had two choices: a contemporary service at 8:30 a.m. (aimed at people their parent's age) or a traditional service at 11 a.m. with full liturgy, geared toward their grandparents. The extra two-and-a-half hours of sleep were sufficient motivation to bring most of them to the later service. So come Sunday morning, a number of young adults with tattoos, various body piercings and neon-dyed hair found their seats in the back of the church, while senior citizens with costume jewelry and lavender rinses in their gray hair sat up in the front, in their time-honored seats.

It was beautiful. *This is what churches should look like*, I thought.

We had several meetings before actually opening up services in late March. At one of those meetings, the issue finally came up of what to name our "church for the left-out." I had some names in mind ever since my retreat, where I had been calling this ministry Chi-Ro Nights (from the first two Greek letters of the word for Christ, Cristos). Other names emerged from the people gathered there in my living room: The Cave, The Dregs, Haven, The Iconoclasts, J2K, B.O.B. (Bunch of Believers).

Then Reese spoke up. He had thought for a few years that Scum of the Earth would be a great name for a group such as this. And he was sure it was in the Bible . . . somewhere . . . He didn't know just where.

Standing up front by the flip-chart, marker in my hand, having just written down all the other ideas for a name, I watched this latest entry flicker in the minds of the group. Then I could see it burn even more brightly in their eyes. A few didn't like it, but most did.

As the official moderator of the meeting I tried everything in my power to sway the group in another direction. I told Reese that he would have to find the phrase in the Bible—even though I had a pretty good idea about where it was! It comes from 1 Corinthians, where Paul is describing the life of faith that he and the other apostles were living:

For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we

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are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. (1 Cor 4:9-13)

Still, I was not in favor of the name. Perhaps I was afraid of it. Maybe I was too insecure to lead a church with a name like that. What would my family and friends think? So I used an old Christian tactic to buy myself some time: I had everyone pray about it for a week before making the final decision. (Yes, I can be that big of a poser, I am ashamed to admit.) In the meantime, I called my mentor and friend Rich Hurst, whose book *Getting Real* was the blueprint for starting this ministry.

“Rich, they want to name the church Scum of the Earth!”

“Mike,” he replied, “don't let them do it!”

The next week we met and it was a done deal. “Scum of the Earth” became the name for our attempt at doing church. It was the best decision I never made.

—adapted from chapter two, *Spectacle: What Churches Should Look Like*



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