

some *forgotten*

**New Testament Truths
About The**

CHURCH

Paul Fahy

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Introduction

This short work is intended to provoke. I want to provoke readers to re-examine the Biblical teaching about God's church. This is described as 'The Glorious Body of Christ' in the New Testament, yet we see very little church life that strikes us as genuinely full of glory. My contention is that this is due to the fact that, historically, churches have not been built on sound Biblical lines. .

Many people are ignorant of this, trusting in the sincerity of their leaders and tradition; but does this allow us to disobey Biblical instructions? Others dismiss it by suggesting that we can never experience a perfect church so we should make the best of the present system and not complain. Does this support ignoring God's word? Yet others say that since there is no detailed instruction manual on church building in the New Testament, we are justified in building the way we do. This needs more comment.

It is true that the Bible offers no blueprint for establishing a new church in a series of rules, regulations and instructions; but it is wrong to suggest that there is no clear pattern or any principles to guide us. Apostolic teaching gives some clear and specific commands (eg celebrating the Lord's Supper, government by elders), some equally clear historical precedents (e.g: missionary practice, the importance of fellowship), and a great many principles.

Now principles are not rules but they are fundamental truths established by reasoning from the text, and as such are primary constituents of church life not to be ignored. For example, a careful reading of the New Testament, and especially of long passages in 1 Cor 11-14, makes it very clear that the local church is an *organic* body which functions on the basis of the participation of every member. Some texts show that without this participation and interdependency, the church will not grow properly (Eph 4:16; Col 2:19). This participation requires the use of gifts which are given sovereignly by the Lord to his people (Eph 4:7; 1 Cor 12:1-6; 1 Pt 4:10). We may not be able to point to a specific 'Thou shalt' (although 1 Cor 14:26 must be as close as you can get), but the overwhelming evidence is that this *koinonia*, or fellowship, is a vital constituent of body life. In fact, scholars are agreed on this; there is no argument. So why do we fail to see this in operation almost everywhere? The reason is that it is risky. It requires constantly depending on God for the next contribution. It is much easier to let someone at the front do all the work, but are not the righteous to live by faith?

So we have commands, precedents and principles by which we can establish how a New Testament church could be established, develop and function. There is no excuse, therefore, to fail to build by these methods. Now some of these principles may be more clear than others (for instance, there is no precise guide as to how large a church should grow before it subdivides). In this case one should build carefully, without dogmatism and be open to discussion and correction. But we must not forget that the builder of the house is God himself and he has given us his Spirit in fulness to ensure that the building is according to his word. A church which is dependent upon God for all its features of development will not go far wrong. Furthermore, since the church is a family, a living thing, God will ensure that the obedient child, which looks to him for support, will develop correctly. Our problem is not lack of knowledge but lack of faith.

This work is an attempt to point the way to some of these New Testament distinctions.

WHY DO WE GATHER AS A CHURCH?

THE BIBLE'S ANSWER COMPARED TO MODERN PRACTICE

1. WE MEET FOR MUTUAL EDIFICATION

It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding (edification) beloved. (2 Cor 12:19)

It is not often understood that the Biblical reason for gathering together is mutual encouragement, edification and exhortation. We come together to support one another and stir one another up to love and good works (Heb 10:24). There are other features of a church meeting, including ministry of the word and worship, but these are not said to be *why* we assemble together.

The key chapter on the church meeting is 1 Cor 14. Here the clear reason for coming together is to edify *one another*. This is the main description of the early church gathered and there is no exegetical reason whatsoever to deny its normative nature. In fact this chapter contains phrases like: *as in all the churches, what I am writing is a command of the Lord, if anyone does not recognize this he is not recognized*. It is as if Paul wants to emphasise that his teaching here is vital to all churches at all times. Commenting upon this passage, the scholar Leon Morris says:

(It) is very important as giving us the most intimate glimpse we have of the early church at worship ... it is our earliest account of a service and it enables us to see something of what the first Christians actually did when they assembled to worship God. Clearly their services were more spontaneous and less structured ...

We need not press *everyone* (or 'each', *hekastos*), as though it meant that every member of the congregation always had something to contribute. But it does mean that any of them

might be expected to take part in the service.¹

- **Edification**

The word *oikodome* is based upon the word *doma* which means an edifice (from *demo*: to build). To it is added the word *oikos* which means a dwelling or home. The whole word came to mean: *the construction of a house*. From this it is used in the New Testament (and elsewhere) for spiritual strengthening, *edification*, ie *building up*.

- **Church Meetings:**

1 Cor 14:5,12,19,26,31: All things are to be done for edification.

Heb 10:24-25: Exhort one another when you come together.

[The word 'exhort' = *parakaleo*, to exhort, encourage, comfort. It is a similar word to edify. Both appear in 1 Cor 14:3 along with consolation' (*paramuthia*).]

- **The General Principle in the Fellowship of the Body:**

Heb 3:13: Exhort one another daily

1 Thess 5:11: Build one another up (*oikodome*) and comfort one another (*parakaleo*)

- **Expressions of Edification in the Body of Christ**

Speaking to one another (Eph 5:18)

Singing to one another (Eph 5:19)

Bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)

Using the gifts that God has given us (1 Cor 12)

Encourage one another (1 Cor 14:3)

Teach one another (Col 3:16)

Admonish one another (Rm 15:14; note that this task is not restricted to the elders)

Comfort one another (1 Thess 4:18)

Read scripture to each other (1 Tim 4:13)

Pray together (1 Tim 2:8)

Break Bread together (Acts 20:7)

- **Focal Points of Edification in the Meeting (Acts 2:42)**

Apostolic Doctrine (not a sermon but organic community instruction, resulting in a growing doctrinal understanding which built character).

Fellowship (Koinonia)

Breaking Bread (ie the Lord's Supper, note Acts 20:7)

¹ Leon Morris; 1 Corinthians, Tyndalke NT Comm. IVP, 1985, p194. Emphasis original.

Prayers

There is something movingly spontaneous about their desire to do things together. Here was a group of people who did not want to be spectators, but participants. Church for them was not just an institution they went to on a Sunday, it was a community that formed the context of their whole lives and about which they felt passionately enthusiastic.²

2. GOD'S PURPOSE IN BUILDING HIS CHURCH

God has determined to reveal his invisible nature through a body of people redeemed and hidden in his Son. Jesus is the full expression of God (Col 2:9) and, in Christ, his redeemed people also express the nature of God (Col 2:10). God's plan is to reveal himself through the church, the Body of Christ, in a corporate expression of his character:

Through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. (Eph 3:10)

We who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. (Eph 1:12)

Consequently, if the local expression of God's testimony in Christ is to be characterised by the glory of God (Eph 3:20-21) it must function corporately. This means that every member has a function and a role to play. It is completely insufficient, therefore, to rely upon only one man, or a few selected people, for the ministry of the church if we are to see a mature testimony to God in Biblical terms.

Initial conclusions

It follows that all genuine, Biblical, Christian meetings should always contain the following elements expressed in diverse ways:

- A focus on Christ being expressed in corporate terms.
- An overriding emphasis on edification, building each other up.
- A focus on community, as against institution.
- A focus on informality, as against formalism.
- A structure that is organic, as opposed to organised.

Key practical elements

- There will be opportunities for unrestricted fellowship within the

² Roy Clements; *The Church that turned the world upside down*, Crossway, Cambridge, 1992, p136.

bounds of decency and order. Everyone can participate in their gifting.

- There will be breaking of bread.
- There will be open prayers, i.e: not a few minutes where there is freedom to pray under leadership direction, but access to praying as the Holy Spirit directs at any time and in any manner.
- There will be a freedom to minister in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- There will be doctrinal instruction of some sort done in an informal organic way, which results in real learning taking place.³

3. THIS REQUIRES EVERY MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Since God's testimony requires a corporate expression through a group not an individual and, if the New Testament teaching on practical church life knows only mutuality not individualism, then it follows that we must all function. The ministries of each member should be discerned, recognized and nurtured for use at appropriate times under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Why is this?

a/ Because we are ALL priests.

No longer, as under the law, is it only one man that ministers to God on behalf of the people (1 Pt 2:5,9). The temple of God must have a functioning priesthood. Together we are that temple, and under the New Covenant, we are all priests called to serve God. In the Old Testament the priest primarily ministered to the Lord by offering sacrifices, to enable worship of God; and praying for the people to maintain fellowship with God, but now:

EXPRESSIONS OF THIS NEW TESTAMENT PRIESTHOOD

Offering a sacrifice:

Rm 12:1 - the sacrifice we are now to present is our own bodies

Heb 13:15-16 - praise from our lips is a sacrifice

- doing good and sharing is a sacrifice

Prayer and worship:

Rev 5:8-9

b/ Because we are told that all are functioning parts of the body.

³ See later and the chapter on the sermon. Teaching should involve the principles of koinonia and edification, the purpose being to see a genuine growth and development of character and understanding. A special meeting given to Bible and doctrinal study is to be favoured. This would enable feedback, questions and discussion.

(1 Cor 14:26)

Each one has been gifted by God and enabled to share in the assembly of the body (Eph 4:7). This sharing is done under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit within meetings, so that all may be edified and Christ revealed through each one.

TYPES OF PARTICIPATION in 1 Cor 14:

- Tongues (v5,26) and interpretation (v13)
- Prophecy (v1, 29)
- Singing hymns (v26 also Col 3:16)
- Singing in the Spirit (v15)
- Praying (v15)
- Giving a lesson (v26 ie a word of instruction, teaching: didache)
- Giving a revelation (v26, presumably via prophecy or a word of knowledge)

- ⇒ Note: that Paul says this instruction is a command of the Lord (v37).
- ⇒ Note: that there is no reference to a sermon (i.e: preaching) at all, let alone it dominating a meeting. This is not to suggest that teaching and exhortation did not take place. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit such ministry ought to be given at appropriate times in the general gatherings, but it would not normally dominate meetings which were interactive. Teaching is obviously vital in the local church. Elders should recognize the need for specific ministry and arrange meetings for instruction (e.g: Acts 20 where the emphasis is a long period of conversational teaching). Small groups, where all present are encouraged to participate with insights or questions, have proven to be more effective in making lasting impressions than preaching from a platform. This would seem to be in keeping with the ethos of 1 Cor 12-14 than the traditional sermon based meeting, nor does it rule out the possibility of extra gatherings held specifically for the purpose of teaching.

There was thus a variety of ingredients in the service. But the guiding rule is 'Let all things be done for edification' (NASB), as Paul has been insisting.⁴

c/ Because we are all part of the body of Christ, no one is dispensable (1 Cor 12)

- Everyone has a potential manifestation of the Spirit for the common

⁴ Leon Morris, op. cit. p195.

good (v7).

- There are varieties of gifts, service and working (v4-5).
- No one member is more important than another (v12,14-26).

d/ Because we need each other to see Christ revealed

- Only as we minister together can we hope to get a glimpse of Christ in expression (1 Cor 12:12).
- Only by every member functioning and relating to others can we grow (Eph 4:15-16).
- Each part (i.e: member) must be working properly and joined within the body (Col 2:19).

[We are looking primarily at the gathering of the body here. Perhaps we need to emphasise at this point that not all gifts are vocal; neither is a member's functionality limited to the church meeting. Very many gifts will be expressed in the community life of the body in the care of one another and charitable work towards outsiders for the Gospel's sake.]

4. THIS NECESSITATES EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING ALL MEMBERS

If everyone is to function as God intended, then we must realise that discipling is vital in bringing people to maturity. The key task for leaders is to develop ministry in *everyone*. The New Testament identifies only one group of people with the responsibility for this oversight of the Lord's people, these are *elders*. There is no other leadership function recognized to have the care of souls. Deacons are to assist in practical serving to alleviate the pressure on elders. Other recognised ministries (eg evangelists) have input to the church under the direction of the elders. The elders are shepherds (pastors) who take care of God's sheep. Paul frequently uses words of nourishing for a description of their ministry: nursing, fathering, shepherding, caring. Like a father seeking to build up his children to maturity, so an elder cares for the nourishment of the people of God (1 Tim 3:5).

Elders will be gifted themselves, for example as teachers. Elders will also ensure that the church has effective ministry when required, for example: input from evangelists to motivate the people to witnessing.

However, this task will usually involve delegation of responsibility (how else would new elders emerge)? Furthermore, the New Testament gives general instruction for the members of the body to care for one

another, admonish one another etc (Eph 5:21; Rm 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Pt 5:5). The elders are to ensure decency and order but not to dominate or rigidly control the whole proceedings.

Nurturing, in fact, is the imperative for leadership

- Saints are to be equipped in order to minister:
And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.
Eph 4:11-12.

The word *equip* (*perfecting*, AV) means: complete, mature. It is used in terms of setting a bone in place, refitting a ship or mending a net. It means to bring to maturity or perfection.

These verses clearly show that the objective of the gifted men referred to is to develop *all* the members of the body so that *each one* may be equipped to minister within his or her gifting for the building up of the body. The idea that ministry in the church is the prerogative of a selected few is alien to the teaching of the New Testament. ⁵

- It involves scriptural instruction (2 Tim 3:16-17; Titus 1:9)
- The analogy of the shepherd pictures development of sheep to maturity (1 Pt 5:1-4)

5. RELATIONSHIPS : THIS REQUIRES *KOINONIA*

Koinonia means: *participation in*, ie giving and taking. It refers to the body life of believers expressed in the local church. Our lives are meant to be interdependent and interactive. The idea of 'going to church' is unknown in the New Testament. The church is the people that constitute it. The word church (*ekklesia*), means a body of people called out and called together.

⁵ Some have tried to avoid the implications of this verse by using the words *for* as applying to the gifted men of v11, ie these men do the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ. However, the Greek words show that this is not true. The gifted men are gifted for (*pros* = for) the equipping of the saints unto (*eis* = to, unto) the work of ministry, to (*eis*) building up the body. Ministry is for training church members to themselves minister and as everyone serves in various ministries (and 'ministry' means 'service') so the church is built up.

- Exemplified by the early church (Acts 2:42, 4:32).
- We are called to minister to one another.

Over 50 times the phrase 'one another' is linked to a command to serve in some way, eg forgive, love, care etc.

6. RELATIONSHIPS : THIS, IN TURN, REQUIRES OPENNESS AND TRUST

Church members are brothers and sisters

We are all closely related to each other, not by blood, but by Spirit. We are called to develop a love relationship in the Body which is a reflection of the love expressed in the Godhead.

The church is a family, the household of God (Eph 2:19)

It is not an institution, nor is it an organisation. It is a place of intimacy. We are called to develop a community in the Body of Christ which is a reflection of the community of love within the Godhead. The analogies for the church in scripture mainly speak about relationships and intimacy, e.g: the body, the family, the vine, the flock.

In all these things we can see that it is only by being open to and trusting each other that we can hope to obey the command of the Lord. If we are to bear one another's burdens, then someone has to say what his or her burden is and another has to be willing to help carry it. Sometimes this may involve confrontation, as when one member needs to admonish another. All should be done with a view to restoring and enhancing relationships in the Body.

WHY ARE SO MANY CURRENT CHURCH SYSTEMS OF GATHERING WRONG?

Church leaders and scholars have often agreed that most traditional systems are not Biblical and that the real purpose of gathering should be for mutual edification. Few, however, have had the courage to change anything. The Puritan Thomas Goodwin, for instance notes that:

[In the] communion of the saints, which the members of a church ought to have with one another [mutual care] is a constant duty, and that we ought to seek all occasions of

acting it.⁶

In conversation with a friend who was once the Principal of a well known conservative Christian Seminary, I was apprised that his students were taught the New Testament pattern, yet informed that they could not expect to practise it when they were placed in a church! Consequently, most people do not even realise that their method of gathering is wrong, or why they gather as they do. Another great Puritan, John Owen, could say in 1689:

For the most part, the churches that are in the world at present know not how they came *so to be*, continuing only in that state which they have received by tradition from their fathers.⁷

Tradition is a poor reason to disobey God. This was recognized even in the days of the early church Fathers:

Custom without truth is error grown old.⁸

Reasons commonly given to gather in the contemporary church

- To hear a sermon
- To worship
- To evangelise
- To maintain a public witness

No matter how worthy each of these things might be, none of them is the reason given in the New Testament to gather together. Even worship is seen as a corollary of gathering rather than the purpose of it.

Although the whole activity of Christians can be described as the service of God and they are engaged throughout their lives in worshipping Him, yet this vocabulary is not applied in any specific way to Christian meetings ... the remarkable fact is that Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them.⁹

We are called to worship continually so that when we come together,

⁶ Works; Vol 11, p355.

⁷ The True nature of a Gospel Church and its government, Works of John Owen, Ed. W.H. Gould, Banner of Truth, London (1968), Vol 16, p25

⁸ Tertullian; NT Order, p285.

⁹ I. Howard Marshall; How far did the early church worship God; Churchman Vol 99 No 3, (1985) p220.

worship will naturally occur. Unfortunately, it has become axiomatic today that we *go to* worship and many have lost the joy of private communion and adoration of God. Worship has also become associated with an experience led event which takes place in a particular fashion in a large meeting in a certain way (usually one which engages the emotions and senses dramatically). We need to recover the ability to worship all the time in all places; to worship in the giving of our lives to God in his continual service (Rm 12:1).

We have seen the reasons for gathering, and what the New Testament says we should do when we do gather. Should we not question the practice of going to a building which we call church, attending without any form of involvement or participation (apart from singing en masse which does not even include choice of song), sitting and listening to one man for a considerable time, and following a carefully prepared liturgy or meeting structure? The apostles would find such procedure astonishing. It has no support in the Bible and fails to train people in righteousness to the degree we should expect. Even the great teacher RL Dabney said that his audience retained a very small percentage of his sermons and failed to develop accordingly even after many years.

The inactive member system is not only unbiblical - it does not work!

**LET ALL THINGS BE DONE FOR EDIFICATION
(1 COR 14:26)**

Development of the church in Acts through the ministry of Paul

The sheer amount of New Testament data which is based upon Paul's exploits and teaching calls for a special examination in this study. Since his teaching in the epistles largely directs our understanding about the body of Christ, therefore, there are many principles which can be established simply by observing Paul's church planting activities reported in Acts. We must also remember that Luke, the writer of the Acts, was often a first hand witness to the events. Let us first summarise the facts.

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

- 45-47 AD (2 years) ¹⁰
- Distance Travelled: 1200+ miles
 - Furthest distance between two key points: 320 miles (Attalia to Seleucia)
 - Shortest distance between two key points: 15 miles (Syrian Antioch to Seleucia)
- Outward Trip: Antioch in Syria - Seleucia (Cyprus - *Salamis, Paphos*; Perga), Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe.
- Return Trip: Lystra, Iconium, Antioch in Pisidia, Throughout Pisidia, Perga.
- Sources: Acts 13:1-14:28; Gal 4 13-15; 2 Tim 3:10-11.

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

- 51-54 AD (3 years)
- Distance Travelled: 2,700+ miles (1290 sea, 1410 land)
 - Furthest Distance between two key points: 650 miles (Ephesus to Caesarea)
 - Shortest distance between two key points: 8 miles (Corinth to Cenchrae)
 - Antioch - Syria and Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia and Galatia, Mysia, Troas, Samothracia, Neapolis, Philippi. Amphiplois,

¹⁰ The chronology used here follows the traditional conservative supposition as espoused by Goodwin (A Harmony of the Life of Paul), Hastings (Dict.), Conybeare & Howson (Life and Letters of Paul), Scroggie (Drama of Redemption etc.). Modern scholarship suggests a slightly later timeframe: ie the first missionary journey start date varies between 44AD (Alford Gk NT), and 46AD (Bruce, Paul-Apostle of the Free Spirit) or even as late as 48AD (Int. Standard Bible Ency.).

Appollonia, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens, Corinth, Cenchrae, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Antioch.

- Sources: Acts 15:36-18:23; Phil 1:30, 4:2-3,16; 1 Thess 1:9-10, 2:1-20, 3:1-6, 4:9-10; 2 Thess 1:1, 3:6-10; 1 Cor 1:14-16, 9:6-15, 16:15; 2 Cor 1:19, 11-6-10.

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

- 54-56 AD (4 years)
- Distance Travelled: 2,500+ miles (1,190 sea, 1,325 land)
Furthest distance between two key points: 400 (Patara to Tyre)
Shortest distance between two key points: 20 (Troas to Assos)
Antioch - Galatia and Phrygia, Ephesus, Troas, Macedonia, Illyricum, Greece, Corinth, Philippi, Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Samos, Trogyllium, Miletus, Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Jerusalem.
- Sources: Acts 18:23-21:16; 1 Cor 1:1, 4:11-12,17, 5:9, 15:30-32, 16:3-11,15-19; 2 Cor1:1,8-11, 2:1,12-13, 7:5-7,13-16, 8:1-8,16-24, 9:1-5,10:15-16, 12:14,17-18,20-21, 13:1-3; Rm 1:8-16, 15:19-29,30-32, 16:1,2,21-23.

NOTABLE FEATURES THAT EMERGE

1. Prolonged stays at key churches

- 18 months in Corinth (Acts 18:11)
- 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31)
- 2 years in Antioch (48-49AD, Acts 14:25-28. Note: the 'long time' can be determined as approximately two years. The council in Jerusalem occurred in 50AD, Paul's first missionary journey was approx. 2 years in between 45 and 50AD; his return to Antioch being about the close of 47AD. See Goodwin p47.)
- A 'long time' in Iconium (Acts 14:1-5). Paul only left because he was forced to.

2. Repeated visits to church plantings

- Paul said to Barnabus, 'Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of God, and see how they do.' (Acts 15:36)
- 'And as they went through the cities ... so were the churches established in the faith and increased in number daily.' (Acts 16:4-5)

	1st visit	2nd visit	3rd visit	4th visit
Pisidian				
Antioch	Acts 13:14-50	Acts 14:21		
Lystra	Acts 14:6-13	Acts 14:21	Acts 16:1	
Iconium	Acts 13:51-2, 14:1-6	Acts 14:21		
Derbe	Acts 14:20-21	Acts 16:1		
Galatia ¹¹	Gal 4:13-15	Acts 16:6	Acts 18:23	
Troas	Acts 16:6-11	Acts 20:1 with 2 Cor 2:12-13	Acts 20:6-12	2 Tim 4:13
Caesarea ¹²	Acts 9:30	Acts 18:22	Acts 21:7-16	Acts 23:31-33 Acts 26:32
Philippi	Acts 16:12+	Acts 20:6	Phil 1:26	
Corinth	Acts 18:1-18	2 Cor 13:2	Acts 20:2,3 2 Cor 2:1 2 Cor 9:3-4 2 Cor 12:14 2 Cor 13:1	2 Tim 4:20
Ephesus	Acts 18:19	Acts 19:1-7	1 Tim 1:3	2 Tim 1:18
Perga	Acts 13:13	Acts 14:25		
Rome	Acts 28:16-31	2 Tim 1:17		
Syria	Gal 1:21	Acts 15:41	Acts 18:18+	Acts 21:3
Macedonia	Acts 16:12	Acts 20:1-2	Acts 20:3-6	1 Tim 1:3

3. The appointment of elders as soon as practically possible.

(Usually on the second visit when the right men began to reveal themselves, 'in every church' Acts 14:23.)

- Lystra (Acts 14:21-23), the second visit during 1st journey.
- Iconium (Acts 14:21-23), the second visit during 1st journey.
- Pisidian Antioch (Acts 14:21-23), the second visit during 1st journey.
- Ephesus (Acts 20:15-38)
- Crete (Titus 1:5)
- Philippi (Phil 1:1)

4. Paul did not leave the churches to evolve alone, but provided

¹¹ Galatia is the same as Phrygia. These words are adjectives not nouns; ie the region was Phrygian and Galatic. The churches involved were Derbe, Iconium, Lystra.

¹² In Caesarea Paul's imprisonment was not in a public jail but given in charge to a soldier, sometimes in a private house. Paul was allowed access to friends (Acts 24:23).

for their development as much as possible until they were stable.

- a) Further personal visits: see the list in 2 above
- b) Visits by his co-workers with his teaching
 - Timothy (to Corinth, 1 Cor 4:17)
 - Timothy & Erastus (to Macedonia, Acts 19:22)
 - Titus and another (to Corinth, 2 Cor 12:17-18, 7:13-15, 8:6)
 - Titus with two brothers (to Corinth, 2 Cor 8:6-8, 16-24, 9:1-5)
- c) Letters of instruction and teaching
 - See NT letters of Paul
 - Another letter (now lost) 1 Cor 5:9
 - Yet another lost letter 2 Cor 2:3-4
- d) Delegations of the church's elders coming to him for counsel
 - Ephesian elders go to Paul at Miletus (Acts 20:17ff)
- e) Visits from church delegates with news, requests for help etc.
 - Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus go to Paul in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:17)

It should be noted that all of these features have been recently denied by some modern teachers. However, Paul's heart is clearly seen in his letters, such a person would not leave a young church to suffer chaos and either survive or disappear, a strategy that has been proposed by some.

Paul was concerned with edification. He stayed with his converts as long as practically possible and often visited them again to strengthen them in the faith. To ensure continued care and good order, he appointed elders as soon as possible in conjunction with the congregation whose choice was clear. When he could no longer visit, he still cared for them by sending men to support them and writing letters of teaching and advice.

Despite this, it is clear that he did not lord it over the church plantings. Even to the church at Corinth he appealed to them and persuaded them rather than make demands of them. Paul's care was for their own development, he did not exercise oversight of the elders.

MINISTRY

1. The Holy Spirit directly called men to minister (Acts 13:1-3)

- This was not a church meeting.

- The focus was worship not strategy.
- All the people present were gifted men: prophets and teachers.
- It involved prayer and fasting.
- All laid hands on the brothers called out.
- The calling was to apostleship.

The focus was evangelism of new areas, not government in the local church. (In fact, choice of elders involves the whole body.) Notice that it is a meeting based upon *koinonia* and mutual gifting where God calls out men to a new work. Fellowship is a seed-bed for divine activity.

2. Paul's ministry did not often involve full-time support.

(Acts 18:1-3, 20:34; 1 Cor 9:1ff; 2 Cor 12:14-18; 1 Thess 2:8-10; 2 Thess 3:7-9;)

The emphasis in Paul's ministry (which is our principal example) seems to be that he frequently supported himself, for example by making tents, and even went into business with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-4). Paul was concerned to not be a drain upon the churches, of which many members were poor or slaves. The emphasis of his life was giving not receiving and this is the key model in the New Testament for leaders to follow.

We must, however, observe that, in Phil 1:5, 4:14-18 and 2 Cor 11:7-9, Paul shows us that he did also receive gifts when required. The scriptures provide guidelines for full-time work for those who labour in prayer, preaching and teaching (Acts 6:4). Paul, however, is the key New Testament model given to us, and we must note that Paul seemed to utilise this infrequently and that the basis was faith not salary (2 Cor 9:8).

3. Paul needed time alone sometimes (Acts 20:13)

Like Jesus before him, Paul made sure that he could be alone to think without pressure and commune with God. He was not on a ministry treadmill. He did not go on one night stand ministry tours but planted churches after extended evangelism in key centres. He then strengthened and edified those believers. However, he found time to fellowship with God, especially on long journeys. Today's frenetic activity allows little time for reflection. Many leaders drive to preaching engagements which is a pressure in itself. Servants of God need to find time, not just to commune with God but for personal reflection.

4. Paul worked with teams

During his ministry over 100 different people were associated with him at various times. Those mentioned most frequently are: Agrippa, Apollos, Aquila, Aristarchus, Barnabus, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Trophimus, Tychicus.

The model for service is communal ministry. The team contains dynamics that provide its own checks and balances with mutual submission. There are clear implications that Paul did not make all the decisions, sometimes a consensus is implied quite strongly. The one man band is not encouraged by scripture.

COMMUNITY

- Paul and Barnabus were called out during a time of communal worship (Acts 13:1-2).
- Hands were laid on them by the other prophets and teachers who identified with their ministry (Acts 13:3) and the church as a whole commends them to the grace of God (Acts 14:26).
- Paul and Barnabus 'strengthened the soul of the disciples' (ie edified them Acts 14:22, 18:23).
- Elders were appointed 'in every church' with prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23).
- The whole church, not just the leaders, is gathered to hear the news of the first missionary journey (Acts 14:27).
- Doctrinal differences required discussion and debate (Acts 15:2,7). The solution is arrived at by common sense (v7-11), reporting of the relevant facts (14:12) and recourse to the scriptures (v15-18). The whole church is involved in the deliberation (v22,25).
- Further missionary work requires the commendation of the body (Acts 15:40).
- Strategic decisions during mission were corporate (Acts 16:10) and involve supernatural wisdom (Acts 16:9).
- Households are baptised (Acts 16:15,33) upon profession of faith (Acts 16:31, 18:8).
- Believers become 'brethren' (Acts 16:40).
- Paul's preaching is accompanied by the brethren (Acts 19:9).
- Paul exhorts the disciples (Acts 20:1) and gives much encouragement (Acts 20:2).

- Paul gathers the community to break bread (Acts 20:7) and discusses with them (not 'preached' as AV).
- Paul taught believers *from house to house* (Acts 20:20). He did not restrict his ministry to preaching to large numbers. He taught the 'whole counsel of God' (Acts 20:27).
- Paul's exhortation to elders is to take heed of the flock (Acts 20:28), elders are guardians who should feed the flock and help the weak (Acts 20:35).
- Fellowship is so close with the Ephesians gathered at Miletus that, on Paul's departure, we read of prayers, kisses, embraces and tears (Acts 20:36-38).
- In Tyre, the brethren take their wives and children to the edge of the city to say farewell to Paul (Acts 21:5) and pray together on the beach.
- All along Paul's journey to Jerusalem he stays with believers and churches (e.g.: Acts 21:4,7,8,16).

CONCLUSION

All these points emphasise that Paul's ministry and strategic development of the church was firmly based upon koinonia/fellowship. He did not act like an autocrat or the head of an organisation, (in spite of being intellectually qualified to do so). On the contrary, he firmly based his own ministry and his principles of building upon fellowship. His aim was to build a family not an institution. This was why he was so loved. His people knew him and could identify with him; he was one of them, not one of an elite.

The Church: *Active Community* or Spectator? (The Lord's Supper vs The Sermon)

Bible expositors often suggest that there is no complete pattern of church practice in the New Testament. Though this is true, there are a number of passages which, if not giving a comprehensive instruction, offer very clear principles which should direct our church experience. In addition there are some specific examples and instructions showing actual components of fellowship life.

The overall principle guiding church practice is *koinonia*.¹³ The local church is a place of mutual encouragement, mutual edification, mutual welfare and mutual submission.¹⁴ Over and over again we are told to act towards *one another* in some way, e.g: to love one another, care for one another, etc. The church is, therefore, a place of *one-anothering*. Even leadership is shared. Church government is in the hands of a group of elders who are equal in authority, although varied in gifting.¹⁵ The motivation and supreme characteristic of leaders is to serve, i.e. having authority for the sake and care of others.¹⁶

There is no indication, in the New Testament, of one man dominating a church meeting; no suggestion that the focus of a gathering is a man at the front. The focus of attention is always the Lord Jesus Christ. The concept of a man making all the decisions in a meeting or dominating a meeting with a single discourse finds no support in the New Testament.

There are two items in modern church practice which arise from Biblical precedent and, as commonly practised, reflect two incompatible patterns of community and spectatorship. These are the Lord's supper and the sermon.

¹³ Literally: to give a share and take a share in something, i.e. participation, fellowship or partnership. In the NT it refers to the communal life of the saints in the sphere of the body of Christ. See: Acts 2:42, 4:32; 1 Cor 12:7, 11-12,14-31.

¹⁴ 1 Cor 14:3,5,26,31; Gal 6:2,10; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Pt 4:10-11

¹⁵ Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23 '*elders*' is plural.

¹⁶ 2 Cor 4:5; Mt 23:11

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's supper has a very clear Biblical pedigree. It arose out of an Old Testament institution; it was established by the Lord with a new, deeper significance; there is specific teaching on it in the New Testament; we see it in apostolic practice and early Christians celebrated it from the first. As an ordinance, it clearly works within, and stimulates *community*. Let us first summarise the evidence.

Old Testament Precursor: The Passover (Exod 12)

The Passover was originally a family celebration of God's deliverance from the Egyptians as the Lord passed over Egypt slaying every firstborn. It consisted of a meal of an unblemished lamb that was known to the family (v6) and unleavened bread (v18). It was instituted as 'a memorial feast for ever' (v14).

Interestingly, it marked the beginning of months for the Jewish calendar (v2) just as the Lord's Supper marks the beginning of the week. The first Passover also marked the beginning of the Jewish nation, while the Last Supper inaugurates the fellowship meal of the Church.

The Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples formed a basis for our practice of breaking bread and took place at the time of the Passover (Mk 14:12) and was their Passover meal (Lk 22:13-15). The bread and wine of the covenant is set in the background of a communal meal (Mk 14:22).

The command of Jesus

Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:17-19; 1 Cor 11:23-25

The chief factors arising from these passages are:

- the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a command of Jesus.
- The original example was set firmly in community in a meal in a room.
- It is a memorial to Jesus' death.
- The bread (one loaf) represents Jesus' body.
- The wine (one cup) represents Jesus' blood.¹⁷
- The wine pictures the establishment of the New Covenant.
- Jesus will not drink wine again until he does so with us in the new

¹⁷ It is very significant that Jesus shared his cup with the disciples, thus breaking the tradition that they all used their own cups. Jesus deliberately emphasises the unity of fellowship here.

age; each celebration of the Lord's Supper is an anticipation of the 'heavenly banquet'.

Resurrection Narrative Precursor

Lk 24:30

Jesus joins the two disciples travelling to Emmaus and is invited to stay overnight. Notice that it was when Jesus broke bread and blessed it that their eyes were opened and they recognised Jesus. Breaking of bread here (and elsewhere: Acts 1:4, 10:41; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 21:9-14) is a means of realising the presence of Jesus.

Early Church Practice

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship (*koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

From the very first we see that Christians met together to function in community. The scope of their meetings was in *koinonia*, i.e. sharing with one another, so that teaching, praying and breaking bread was a mutual activity of encouragement. [The 'daily' reference in Acts 2:46 seems to apply to the visits to the temple, not to breaking bread. Even if it did, all agree that such a custom gradually disappeared to be replaced by a weekly meeting of the Lord's Supper, certainly by the time of the first Letter to the Corinthians - about 57 AD.]

Apostolic Practice

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.

There is disagreement over what exactly this means. Historically it has been understood to mean that it was Paul's practice to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly on Sunday. This is the natural meaning of the text and there must be strong reasons based on alternative evidence to overthrow it. Without such evidence, others suggest that Paul just happened to be breaking bread that day. This compelling Biblical and historical evidence for establishing Sunday as the Christian day for gathering (1 Cor 16:2) is linked to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

When the church met on the Sunday it was usual to hold the Lord's

Supper¹⁸

Specific Teaching

1 Cor 11:20-34

Paul specifically says that this takes place: ‘*when you assemble as a church*’ (v18), ‘*when you meet together*’ (v20). This is not an activity which is solely relegated to lesser meetings (if there are such things), or friends gathering for a meal, but when the church as a whole assembles.

Furthermore, this meeting is comparatively relaxed, compared to our modern gatherings, since people are eating together (v21,34). Other references imply that the early church often celebrated the Lord’s Supper in the context of a larger fellowship meal. Paul’s criticism in v22 is not that it was wrong to do this, but that it was practised wrongly, with some folk being ignored and left hungry whilst others got drunk.¹⁹

Paul received the institution as a command from the Lord: ‘**Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me**’ (v25). It’s purpose is to proclaim the Lord’s death (v26), to celebrate Christ’s atonement: the satisfaction of God’s wrath against sin evidenced in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ and his glorious resurrection and ascension. We are to focus regularly (at least weekly) upon this central aspect of our faith and not allow ourselves to centre on anything else. God knows our weakness for running after novelties and he demands that the remembrance of the death of Jesus is the central feature of our gatherings.

Furthermore, the word ‘proclaim’ (*katangelo*) is mainly associated with the preaching of the Gospel, meaning that the Lord’s Supper is a means of declaring God’s message of grace through Christ’s death and resurrection, especially if this includes explanatory words during the service. Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 10 also stresses that the Lord’s Supper is a participation in Jesus’ body and death, thus real fellowship with the risen Lord takes place during the meal, just as Jesus was

¹⁸ I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, Paternoster Press, 1980, p108. Some would dispute this arguing from Paul’s teaching in Rm 14:5-6 and Col 2:16. Others would respond by saying that Paul is, here, only referring to Jewish feast days.

¹⁹ This meal is called an *agape* or *love feast*, (Jude 12; Ignatius, *Letter to Smyrnaeans*, 8:2), of which we have little information. It fell into disuse after the second century. It appears that the rich believers had enough food to be gluttons and wine to be intoxicated, but failed to share it with the poor who had little; thus destroying the love and unity which the Lord’s Supper spoke about.

known in the post-resurrection meals.

We must eat in a worthy manner (v27). In other words we must treat this seriously and with reverence. It must not be engaged in frivolously. However, this does not mean that it is to be a lifeless ritual. Remember that it was shared in a communal atmosphere of fellowship and a meal. The practice of it should engage the realities of fellowship not ceremony.

We must examine ourselves before we eat (v28). The reason given for this is that we must *discern the body* (v29).²⁰ This is very serious because failure to do it results in a chastising judgment from God (v29-32). Paul here emphasises the communal activity in this memorial. If we are in a wrong spirit with a brother or sister (e.g. harbouring bitterness) then we cannot share in something which testifies to our unity. The supper is a corporate celebration testifying to the fact that Christ has purchased us by his blood and formed us into one body, hence one cup and one loaf.²¹ To be in denial of this by being angry with another Christian present desecrates the spiritual value of the institution. This is dangerous and must be dealt with before the meeting (compare Jesus' instruction in Matt 5:21-24). Remember, the specific Corinthian sin referred to here seems to be the selfish attitude of those with money to bring more expensive supplies to the meal. These denied Christ's body by ignoring the needs of the poorer brethren.

Finally, we must wait for one another (v33). This implies serving one another in patience and fellowship. The Lord's Supper testifies to our oneness: we must show love to each other in our gathering together.

The Lord's supper is a communal activity, commanded by the Lord and insisted upon by the apostles. Failure to practice it with godly discernment results in the judgment of God. The supper is an essential feature of church life.

The Sermon

²⁰ *Discerning the body* means understanding and observing the spiritual unity of believers in the church, especially in connection with its practical outworking in the breaking of bread. Resenting a brother, whilst acting symbolically in union with him, is failure to do this.

²¹ Note Paul's emphasis of the loaf representing unity in 1 Cor 10:16-17.

In contrast to the Lord's supper, the sermon (in the form that we are used to today) did not arise till two to three hundred years after the death of Jesus. It became fixed in the experience of the church especially after the Reformation in the 16th century. There is scant evidence for sermons taking place within church meetings as the means of edification in the New Testament church, nor is there much Old Testament precedent for it and the apostles give no instruction to use this means in the local church to develop maturity in saints. What is clear is that it militates against community life. Let us examine the evidence for this.

Old Testament Evidence

We do see occasional sermons taking place in the Old Testament, but only very seldom and for specific reasons. Speeches of various kinds, to various people, using various forms (e.g. poetry) took place; but we do not see evidence of a regular sermon, in the modern sense, being used as part of Israel's worship system, nor can we identify the actual format of these speeches, or their length. Some were very long (Neh 8-9) some appear to be very short. Prophetic instruction included many forms (drama, symbolism, poetry, harangue, argument, discourse, condemnation etc.). Furthermore, active participation in these speeches appears to have been common (Isa 5:3ff; Amos 3:3-8).

Frequently the reason for a speech or 'sermon' was a crisis, failing, sin, error, national religious decline etc.; it was not a usual form for edification of a sound religious community.

The Old Testament and related writings provide no clear parallel to modern regular sermons.²²

We cannot look to the Old Testament for support for the modern system of a discourse often occupying 50% of a church's worship service, neither can it be shown to be God's method of edification in a godly community.

New Testament Evidence

The sermon is not identified in the New Testament as the preferred means of edification. It is not even the exclusive means of evangelising

²² David Norrington, *To Preach or not to Preach*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1996, p4. Though not the first to state the thesis that the sermon is not the means of Biblical edification of the Body of Christ, Norrington is the first to provide a thorough, scholarly presentation of the argument. He makes a strong case which has yet to be answered, if possible. Several of his thoughts have found their way into this paper, for which I am grateful.

outsiders. About thirty different words are used for the proclamation of God's word which the AV has translated as *to preach*. Proclamation took many different forms in various situations. Paul, for instance, frequently uses argument and persuasion, words which suggest interaction. In any case, even when preaching is referred to, we have no idea what the form was (style, length, stance etc.) and cannot read our modern practice into it. Using examples of New Testament speeches to defend modern practice is also tricky because we do not know if they are edited versions, complete transcriptions, or summaries of various speeches etc. Even Paul's discourse in Troas, possibly the best example of a sermon in a church meeting context, is not conclusive. The words *dialegomai* and *logos* can imply conversation as well as formal discourse. Later the term *homileas* is used which means conversation (Acts 20:11). In any case that meeting was a special farewell occasion requiring exceptional need to pass on teaching.

Early Historical Evidence

There is nothing in the writings of the sub-apostolic church fathers to suggest that a regular sermon was the means of teaching in church services. In fact, it seems that it was only used on special occasions or to deal with specific problems.²³

Sermons were well established by the third century with people like Origen and Tertullian. Even then they admit that there was little long term effect on Christians (e.g. Clement of Alexandria²⁴), and they are hardly comparable with our passive present day experience as they contained interruptions, interactivity and feedback.²⁵

The origin of the sermon, as we know it today, stems from the pagan Graeco-Roman practice of rhetoric. Displays of these speeches were like a theatrical performance to the Romans and the Greeks and it was a technique used as the basis for education. Gradually style and performance became more important than the content of argument, persuasion and discussion, and speeches became based on emotionalism and sophistry. The gradual debasing of rhetoric took place in the later period of the Roman empire, just when the sermon came to prominence.

Many of the church fathers and Christian leaders were trained in

²³ Norrington, op cit p12-13.

²⁴ B J Kidd, Hist. of the church to AD461, 1922, I, 405.

²⁵ Norrington op. cit. p14.

rhetoric before they became preachers (e.g. Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine). This was not necessarily bad in itself as a technique, but pagan ideas were already corrupting the Gospel by 100 AD (e.g. Clement of Rome). Although Paul has clear understanding of pagan writings and philosophies, his explanation of Christian truth was not dependent upon rhetorical conventions (1 Cor 1:10ff), so we must withstand reliance upon methods which endanger the sanctity of truth.

The sermon developed at the same time as some other important church features:

- **The decline of the spiritual gifts** in church meetings, where individuals looked specifically to the Holy Spirit to supply what was needed within fellowship meetings, whether it was encouragement, help, knowledge etc. The lack of genuine teaching ministry and the emergence of preachers is significant; the former sees its end in the development of individuals, too often the latter becomes an end in itself.
- **The disappearance of mutual ministries** in fellowship; one anothering became subservient to sitting at the preacher's feet.
- **Growing membership and organised, formal church meetings.** After the edict of Milan in 313, persecution ceased and it was trendy to join a church and follow the example of the emperor. Churches grew but with mixed membership of believers, and mere professors. The growth led to hardened rigid structures. Meetings becoming more and more systematised and the church was susceptible to overt pagan ideas. Newcomers may have looked on the sermon as entertaining rhetorical display.
- **The development of institutional ministries**, especially monarchical bishops, resulted in a clear divide between clergy and laity, a completely unbiblical distinction.
- **Changes in Biblical interpretation**, especially the over development of fanciful, allegorical interpretation (e.g: Origen) which is less practical, puffs up preachers and tends to distort the truth.
- **The move out of homes into church buildings** necessitating great changes of various sorts; e.g.: dependence upon money for establishment and maintenance, the buildings rather than the members becoming a focal point of the testimony, the loss of intimacy due to seating arrangements, the focus of the interior design upon the man at the front, distracting decoration and paintings, etc.

The Reformation Model

The sermon was particularly used by God in the Reformation because

of the desperate need of multitudes of common people for teaching and knowledge. The sermon was the most effective way of communicating a lot of information to many people (in and outside the church) in the quickest possible time. It should be remembered that the ordinary citizen had virtually no knowledge of the Bible as access had been denied him by the Roman Catholic church. On occasion, Martin Luther was able to completely reverse declining church/social situations by force of preaching alone. For instance when he returned from 'captivity' at the Wartburg castle, he completely restored order by preaching solidly everyday, convincing all, both religious and secular authorities, of the correct way forward.

We should also remember, however, that preaching was not the only means of establishing believers in the Reformation and the times which followed. Printing had recently made the distribution of books, pamphlets and tracts relatively cheap and easy. The Bible was also now freely available in vernacular tongues. Luther's translation of the Bible into German and Calvin's release of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* had a profound influence upon the time. Studies have shown that the release of the Authorised Version in English also had huge consequences, both in religious and social life. Puritans felt that reading was enormously beneficial in promoting godliness; in fact some felt it was a better method than preaching, because the individual could go over and over teaching at his own pace (e.g: Richard Baxter and Thomas Brooks made this point).

Summary of the nature of preaching as a technique of teaching

Throughout history leaders have been disappointed that preaching yields such poor long term results in the character development of believers. An honest evaluation of the state of many current Christian churches surely confirms this still to be the case. Those believers who develop well are the ones that engage in private, reflective Bible study over and above church meetings.

Preaching tends to elevate a specific individual but does not encourage mutual ministry, which is the Biblical precedent. A godly, sound, humble teaching ministry may overcome this and bless the church, but how much sound pulpit ministry is available today? Biblical teaching methods involve communal principles of interactivity, stimulation to participate, receptivity and feedback. Questions are vital in this technique. This helps teachers to scratch where people itch and so provides real help. If you do not ask, you will not know what people need.

In training men, the Biblical method is apprenticeship which involves relationship, whilst preaching is more like a lecture, a form that many ordinary folk cannot cope with. In any event, we are told that the attention span of many modern young people is abysmally short, probably less than ten minutes. Preaching is, therefore, not an effective means of teaching the flock without interactivity. Today the televisual sound-bite reigns, unlike days gone by when people were used to listening to long monologues. This can be overcome with Biblical interactive teaching methods.

The sermon is not commanded, in the New Testament, for use as the means of edification in the church and there is no precedent for it as the focus of fellowship life. It is contrary to the New Testament methods of building up the body, which is mutual edification (1 Cor 14) and its present form arose largely from a non-biblical tradition.

Conclusion

What is staggering is that, despite the general recognition of the Biblical case for the celebration of the Lord's supper, it is widely practised very differently from the New Testament pattern almost everywhere, and in some cases ignored altogether!

Many 'Restoration' churches are so large and so busy that the Lord's Supper is celebrated only rarely. When I questioned the leader of the largest of these churches in the South East, he agreed that it was Biblical to celebrate it in the manner described, but chose not to do so since the logistics for a church of over 900 (as it was then) was too difficult. Many other churches in the historic denominations perform a ritual which is called the Lord's supper, yet is so far from the style and spirit of the New Testament Supper as to be almost unrecognisable. It is formal rather than informal, it is led by a man from the front as opposed to being a communal activity, and instead of the one cup mentioned by Paul and Jesus, we see little glasses which are passed around ceremonially in special containers. We could go on.

On the other hand, the modern sermon, which has little scriptural support, is everywhere practised in all denominations, new and old. In fact, it is probably the one visible activity which identifies Christianity to outsiders. A church leader is called a 'preacher', buildings are erected with the intent of people being spoken to, not sharing together and believers are called 'church-goers'. With the sermon able to underpin

and strengthen authoritarian leaders, a growing problem in these days, it is clear that a return to Biblical practice is long overdue.

Leadership in the New Testament Church

Some Basic Principles

Many forms of church leadership visible today are taken from worldly methods of people organisation and not from God's word. Even some of the more Biblical churches seem to fail when it comes to this subject. It is vital we see firstly, the clear principles that Jesus laid down for those in positions of responsibility and secondly, specific guidelines laid down by the apostles for the actual leadership of churches.

Leadership Principles of Jesus

- No Christian should seek first place** (Lk 14:11, 18:14).
- Leadership is service** (Mt 23:11; Jn 13:12-16).
- Leaders should not use esteemed authoritarian titles** (such as rabbi, father, Mt 23:7).
- Leaders are not to wield authority over believers** (Mk 10:40-45).
- Leadership involves sacrifice** (2 Cor 1:3-7, 12:15).
- Leadership does not include financial gain.**
- Leadership involves suffering** (Heb 2:10; 1 Thess 2:2, 3:3-4,7; Phil 4:12; 2 Cor 11:23ff, 12:10).

Apostolic Instruction

- A fundamental principle is that there is no class structure in Christianity, no existence of 'clergy' and 'laity'. The New Testament affirms the priesthood of all believers** (1 Pt 2:9; Col 2:18-19, 3:11).
- Leadership is slavery to Jesus** (Greek-*doulos* Gal 1:10).
- Leadership is service to the saints.**
 - ◆ words used for leadership functions include: *diakonos* (a table waiter), *hyperetes* (an under-rower), and *leiturgos* (a servant of the state or temple).
- Leadership is sacrificial** (2 Tim 4:6-7).
- Leadership involves:**
 - ◆ **Nurturing** (1 Thess 2:7)
 - ◆ **Fathering** (1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:11)
 - ◆ **Loving** (1 Tim 6:11)
 - ◆ **Caring** (1 Pt 5:2)

- ◆ **Providing** (1 Thess 2:8)
- ◆ **A fight for the faith** (1 Tim 6:12)
- ◆ **Supplying what is lacking in faith** (1 Thess 3:10)
- ◆ **Admonishing** (1 Thess 5:12)
- ◆ **Hard work** (Col 2:1)
- ◆ **Prayer** (Col 1:9)
- **Leadership is to provide an example in righteous behaviour** (1 Tim 6:11; 1 Thess 2:10).
 - ◆ Paul encourages believers to imitate him because he sought to lead by example as well as by teaching (1 Cor 4:16; 2 Thess 3:9; 1 Thess 1:6, 2:14, 4:1; Phil 3:17).
 - ◆ Peter commands elders to set an example (1 Pt 5:3).
- **Leadership does not involve a salary and is rarely full-time work. Usually elders will be in full or part-time secular employment, working as a team in governing the local church.**
 - ◆ Full-time ministry is reserved for those whose ministry of the word is recognised to demand their release from other occupations (Acts 6:4).
 - ◆ Full-time ministry would include itinerant teachers and possibly prophets and evangelists who move among the churches. Apostles sent out to plant might need to be full-time, but even then full-time service is not inevitable as Paul's ministry as an apostle clearly shows (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8).
 - ◆ Occasionally, a shepherd (elder) may need to be released from secular work to relieve the strain on the eldership team if the situation clearly demands it, such as in a time of revival (1 Tim 5:17-18), or many pressing problems.
 - ◆ Support of full-time workers is a matter of faith. There is no indication, in the New Testament, that salaries are to be paid to full-time workers. In fact, the indication is to the contrary; but those receiving ministry should prayerfully give to the servant (1 Tim 5:17). Salaries lead to complacency in the receiver and also to control by the holder of the purse. This is an observable fact in Church history. Living by faith requires continual dependence upon the Lord. True ministry will not be let down by the God who provides for every good work (2 Cor 9:8). History recounts many examples of men who proved this to be true (e.g: J. Hudson Taylor, George Mueller, G. H. Lang,).
 - ◆ The distribution of money given by the church should be the overall responsibility of elders, under God, and delegated to representatives (deacons) as necessary (2 Cor 8:6). Those

receiving money should not be involved as a matter of propriety.

- ◆ A prime subject for alms are the poor and needy (Acts 6; 2 Cor 8:4; Gal 2:10). Ministers should be recipients after this has been taken care of.

□ **Local leadership of a church is by elders.**²⁶

- ◆ **Who are men** (1 Tim 2:12, 3:2 'husband').
- ◆ **Not recent converts** (1 Tim 3:6).
- ◆ **Who 'govern' in plurality** (Titus 1:5 'elders' plural).
- ◆ **Who are equal in authority** (There is no mention of a senior pastor in the New Testament).
- ◆ **Whose main role is to protect and feed the sheep** (1 Pt 5:1-4).
- ◆ **Who will be able to teach** (1 Tim 3:2).
- ◆ **Whose goal is to release ministry within the body** (Eph 4:9-16; Col 1:28-29).

□ **Deacons are the only other church office under elders** (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13).

- ◆ **This office includes women** (1 Tim 3:11²⁷, Rm 16:1²⁸).
- ◆ **The office is mainly to meet practical needs.** (Acts 6, although these men are not stated to be deacons, it is evident that the work they did was that of deacons.)

□ **Gifted men function in the church under the direction of the elders.**

- ◆ **Some have input to the local church.**

These are: evangelists, prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1-4; Eph 4:11-12)

- ◆ **Others are sent out from the local church.**

These are: apostles, teachers, prophets and evangelists (Acts 8:4, 13:1-4)

□ **Major decisions in the local church involve the whole body and are arrived at by consensus.**

- ◆ Acts 15:22: A controversy arose that required a major decision regarding essential doctrine. Although the elders and apostles lead the discussion, the whole assembly is present throughout

²⁶ The terms Bishop and Elder refer to the same person: Acts 20:17 with 28; Titus 1:5-7. Elder (*presbuteros*) originated from the Jewish concept (Lk 7:3); bishop (*episkopos*) was a Greek term used in the city-states. Both carry the idea of super-intendents or guardians.

²⁷ Some commentators believe that the text here is referring to the wife of a deacon. The Greek word can mean wife or woman.

²⁸ Some commentators and theologians dispute that *diaconos* here is used in a technical sense for the ministry of a deacon and suggest that it refers to being a servant.

the discussion (v12, 22, 23 *brethren*). There are no secret meetings. The choice of representatives involved the whole church.

- ◆ Acts 6: The appointment of the seven is the only *extended* narrative we have regarding selection of any church officers. It cannot, therefore, be ignored and must be weighed with other statements (e.g: those that emphasise apostolic appointment). Here it is clear that the choice was made by the people. We cannot insist that it was by an election; the words used mean *to select*. What is clear is that the choice was unanimous.
- ◆ Most of the NT letters are addressed to the whole church, not the leaders.²⁹

Apostolic Warnings

- The commission to leadership can come under reproach and be lost. It must be carefully guarded** (1 Tim 6:14, 20).
- Leaders can sin** (1 Tim 5:20).
- Leaders can err** (James 3:2; Gal 2:11).
- Leaders must not be ‘men pleasers’** (1 Thess 2:4-6).
- Leaders are a prime target for deception because they can influence many others** (2 Cor 11:13-15; Matt 24:4,5,11,16,24; 1Tim 3:7).

A Quick Look At The Ascension Ministries

The purpose of ministry is to develop individuals in their gift and expression of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each person is unique in this expression and a leader’s job is to enable everyone to function in their particular manifestation of the character of the Lord.

Ephesians chapter four is especially important in this regard as it explains this very clearly:

- ◆ grace is given to each one according to the gifting given by Christ (v7);
- ◆ gifting is to be used to equip the saints to be able to minister (v12);

²⁹ The precise format for working this out is not completely clear in the NT. Each local church must come to its own conclusions on this matter under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Larger churches may develop different applications to smaller ones. The key principle is that decisions are not made in secret by a group of leaders. The whole church is involved to some degree.

- ◆ by doing so the body is built up (v12);
- ◆ the goal is the unity of the faith and maturity in Christ as a body (v13). Paul specifically mentions five gifts given to men which are key in this task.

APOSTLE

❑ **Along with the prophet, this ministry is said to be foundational in establishing churches** (Eph 2:20).

❑ **There is a clear difference between the *apostles of the Lamb* and the *apostles to the church*.**

- ◆ The former are unique and are inspired to write scripture (along with others like Luke and Mark). They perform signs and wonders. They include Paul as well as the 12 (2 Cor 12:11-12).

- ◆ The latter are not inspired to write scripture and serve the body as church planters. Examples include: Andronicus, Junias.

❑ **Apostles are *sent out* from a church under the sovereign call of God to plant new churches** (*apostolos* derives from *apostello* meaning: *to send out*, Acts 13:1-4).

❑ **The apostleship gift strategises and develops mission activity, but the gift of shepherding is required, in addition, to gather people.**

- ◆ Modern, so called, apostles have been let loose within the local community and have scattered the sheep with a constant push for mission activity and nervous activism. It appears that Biblical apostles to the church had several gifts (evangelism, apostleship, shepherding, miracles, etc.) and avoided this problem; although Corinth was split as a result of gifted men.

❑ **Within the local church, which is their home base, they are to continue to function within whatever ministry they had before the call.**

- ◆ They do not carry authority at the home base as an apostle but only serve in their particular local gift. In the case in Acts 13 Barnabas and Saul (Paul) were prophets and teachers (v1: cf. 2 Tim 1:11).

- ◆ Elders remain in responsibility for the local church. Apostles do not carry authority over them. In fact, an apostle has no function within an *already established* local church as an *apostle*.

- ◆ Anyone receiving the genuine call of God to be sent out to apostolic work can be an apostle, a church planter; but this will

require that he be gifted in the realm of teaching and evangelism.

◆ There are false apostles who must be judged.

Apostles usually work in teams (2 Cor 8:23; 2 Thess 1:1; Col 4:10; Phil 4:2-3)

PROPHET

☐ This is a man who hears the counsel of God and represents it to the people.

☐ It may or may not include foretelling of events.

◆ If it does, this clearly must be tested. If the prophecy fails to take place, that man is a false prophet and must be denounced and dismissed from responsibility (Deut 18:21-22).

☐ Prophecy helps people to determine what God's will is in a given situation.

◆ But it should be noted that though his word may be true, in some circumstances his counsel may be withstood. Agabus was correct in his prophecy of Paul's chains, but Paul discerned that the will of God for him was to preach the Gospel in Caesar's palace (Phil 1:12-13).

☐ A false prophet may perform a sign or a wonder whilst secretly leading believers to follow false gods. Such must be denounced and dismissed (Deut 13:1-5).

☐ Various prophets may speak, but their words must be weighed by local leadership (1 Cor 14:29-33).

☐ The office of a prophet is different from the ordinary act of prophesying,

◆ just as there is an obvious difference between sharing an encouragement from the word and the recognised ministry of teaching.

EVANGELIST

☐ is a man gifted in leading people to the Lord.

☐ Though he is gifted in soul winning he may be a poor teacher, unless he has that gift also. Folk should not look to evangelists for solid instruction.

☐ Philip is an example (Acts 8:4ff, 26ff).

☐ He is also able to train other people to be successful in this task (2 Tim 2:1-2 with 4:5).

☐ As a fisher of men, he can bring people into the net, but he cannot successfully build and gather without the associate gifts of apostleship and pastoring.

SHEPHERD

- ❑ **An elder must have this gift which means to shepherd, i.e. to gather people into a secure family (1 Tim 3:5). [Greek= *poimen*, one who tends, feeds, guides, nourishes and rules a flock (Eph 4:11).]**
- ❑ **It is the crucial leadership gift in the church.**
- ❑ **His qualities are clearly seen in the Biblical function of the shepherd.**
- ❑ **It is a solemn task and even God is described as a shepherd of his people many times (e.g. Ps 23:1; Isa 40:11; Jn 10).**
- ❑ **He must protect the sheep by confronting error and deceivers (Titus 1:9-11).**
- ❑ **At the day of judgment, a shepherd will have to give an account of every action toward the sheep, false shepherds face severe denunciation (Ezek 34).**

TEACHER

- ❑ **The role of the teacher is another crucial task in the local church. Elders should have this gift in some measure (1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:9, 2:1).**
 - ◆ An elder may not be able to preach from a platform, but must be able to teach solid instruction to individuals.
- ❑ **The role requires sound theological knowledge resulting from diligent study.**
 - ◆ The gift does not mean that someone receives it and suddenly becomes wise in the Word.
 - ◆ Teaching ministry results from deep experiences with God as well as academic study. Often God will take a teacher through much suffering to learn spiritual principles.
- ❑ **A teacher requires ability to communicate to the ordinary person.**
- ❑ **Teachers can still make mistakes, they are not infallible (Jam 3:1-2). Since it is such an important gift, requiring care in its application, the consequences of false teaching are very serious and damaging (Jam 3:5).**

Some balk at the potential of modern apostolic and prophetic ministry and state that some of these gifts have vanished; these are often the same folk that would say that the spiritual gifts of 1 Cor 12 have also passed away. This is not the place to dispute this and many worthy books have fought this battle before. Suffice to say that it does extreme violence to the text to arbitrarily excise apostleship and prophetic ministry but retain pastor, teacher and evangelist. This is clearly

illogical and false reasoning. The widespread misuse of both sorts of gifts in recent years does not prove that genuine gifts are not still being exercised in the will of God.

Leadership Does Not Include

Domineering attitudes (1 Pt 5:3).

- ◆ It is interesting that the strongest NT word describing ruling in authority is used of women in the home: *oikodespoteo* in 1 Tim 5:14. It means literally: *master of the house*.
- ◆ Church leadership words have more to do with *care*.
- ◆ The authority of leaders has to do with the exposition of God's truth.
- ◆ Even Paul had *to urge, to appeal, to bid, to consider what I say* (*parakaleo*, e.g: 2 Tim 2:7).
- ◆ The word *overseer* (bishop) is not used in the factory foreman sense but of watching over the flock for their welfare.
- ◆ The doctrine of submission has to do with order within church, e.g. following the shepherd into good pasture. You do not follow the shepherd over a cliff.

Layers of rank.

- ◆ 1 Cor 12:28 is not suggesting order of priority in leadership rank but the priorities of function in building the church from its foundations, the order of foundational ministries. These leadership terms are not addressed in this letter's greeting nor is there any indication here that worship is supervised by leaders.

Use of constraint (1 Pt 5:2).

Always being at the front.

Being a manager instead of a father.

Being the only one to minister (1 Cor 14:26).

Discipline outside church matters.

- ◆ *Ruling or governing* is used only for ecclesiastical issues.
- ◆ The word 'to rule' (*proistemi*) in 1 Thess 5:12 can mean to lead or to stand before; but also to attend, be concerned about, give aid or care e.g: Rm 12:8; Titus 3:8,14. Phoebe is nominated by this term which is translated '*helper*'.

Shameful gain from the flock (1 Pt 5:2).

- ◆ Modern versions of this would include expecting members to purchase tapes, videos, books and other resources at high

prices; attending expensive conferences; giving towards building purchases; supporting large numbers of full-time workers (especially if they are highly paid); paying for new cars and houses for leaders, etc.

Conclusion

The practice of true Biblical principles of leadership is absolutely vital for the expression of a genuine New Testament church. If these principles are not in place, then it matters little how sincere or godly the whole church may be; eventually the church will suffer. This may not occur in scandalous or extreme ways (though it often has in history), but it is impossible for the body not to be affected by improper leadership.

If this is true, why has the church turned such a blind eye to practices which are clear to see in scripture? Is it not that all too often we prefer to lean on the arm of the flesh, to look to men instead of trusting God. Is it not like Israel wanting a king to be like the other nations? The reader is invited to look at the items on the list and ask how many of these are in place in the UK church? Should we accommodate such a discrepancy?

A Vision for God's Strategy Today

The Current Situation in English Christianity

Over the last twenty five years new church denominations appeared and developed into rigid organisations when independent house churches united under a common leadership. Other church groups began to merge with these major streams/networks (i.e. denominations). As certain leaders accumulated power into a central base, they spawned authoritarianism with organisational heads, often called apostles, but in practice they are more like archbishops. Under them are apostolic teams (i.e. bishops) with local church leaders under their influence (acting as vicars). This situation applies to Restorationism. The New Churches are very similar but would see themselves as less organised and rigid, however, some of these have publicly cast away the Bible as their sole source of authority.

Both variants have espoused Toronto and the Signs and Wonders Movement eagerly. In the 90's, however, there has been a gradual draining of membership. Some 'apostolic' leaders have fallen on hard times with a reduction in numbers of churches in allegiance. Others have continued to grow through unification of churches joining the group, but are losing members at a local level. The steady stream of leaders and members leaving, estimated in thousands per annum, gives the lie to the notion that all is well. Even the Guardian newspaper recently (Oct 96) showed statistics that implied these churches are in decline.³⁰

Many left as a result of the authoritarianism, lack of body life, restraint of gifted members, failure to care for the sheep. Some of those that hung on later had problems with the Kansas City Prophets and involvement with the Faith Movement and subsequently left. Later some, who had just about clung on, voted with their feet after Toronto showed its true colours.

³⁰ Eg. Frontline Magazine (NFI) Oct 96 page 5 admits that 'numbers had hit a plateau for '8 years or more'. This, incidentally, stems from the time the 'apostle' initiated a 'one mega church' strategy.

Many leaving the New Churches, built upon men and experiences, have looked for integrity and solid Biblical teaching and wandered into various orthodox churches, often Reformed, Baptist or Anglican. It was not long before the inherent problems of the state church left them cold. Those that stayed a while were rocked by the inter-faith movement, homosexual priests, women's ordination, financial scandal, closeness to the Roman church and so on. This is not the way forward. Many Baptist churches seem to be closely following the New Church pattern but ten years behind the times, so that was uncomfortable too. Some finding their way into Reformed independent or Presbyterian churches found a solid theology, sound preaching and godly discipline, but the problem was that many such churches are dry as dust, dead on their feet, the *frozen chosen*. Not only is the Holy Spirit's genuine activity ignored, but the whole system works against the Spirit's ministry to glorify Jesus. Usually these churches also provide zero opportunities for individuals to share their gifts in a Biblical manner thus ensuring their gradual starvation.

[One gladly recognises that a few churches in these streams are working well, but within the confines of a traditional system that rarely encourages body life and elevates men, especially men who preach. The leaders may work in integrity but their very ministry highlights an unbiblical divide between them and the 'ordinary' member. We thank God for what good they do, but they are not the Biblical model for us to follow.]

The sad story is that many of those who ran to what they thought was an oasis in the desert could stand it no longer and found themselves in a wilderness again. Generally these fall between two stools; on the one hand are those who hate the ungodly excesses of Restorationism especially where this is forming into networks of cults; on the other are those who are faced with the dry formalism of dead orthodoxy. Many have voted with their feet and are going nowhere at all, are drifting in and out of churches or stay on the sidelines at one in which they do not feel fully at ease in. Various estimates of this group show that, in Britain, it includes perhaps over ten thousand people. [A side note is that many of these people are injured by the way they were treated and require help, they are like those that went to David in Adullam's Cave.]

In this melting pot, many different ministries have grown up to cater for the needs of various folk. Often these tend to focus on some particular doctrine or another, usually with an eschatological bent of some kind. In a search for security, it's all too possible to be satisfied with novelty.

Eschatology is not given us as a unifying feature in the New Testament but as an encouragement, a comfort. In history, concentration upon eschatology has usually resulted in division. It is not a primary doctrinal issue and can create a warped elitism (i.e. 'we are the persecuted true remnant').

Others have felt that a different eschatological focus was needed and have elevated a Jewish distinctive in the church. At its worst extreme this has created churches which have fallen into the errors condemned by Paul in Galatians and Colossians, and also by the letter to the Hebrews, where Christians are adopting traditional Judaism: celebrating Jewish feasts, having rabbis, going to the 'synagogue' and even wearing phylacteries. Others who have not gone so far are still going off at a tangent by elevating a rabbinic Jewish mindset in hermeneutics (Biblical interpretation) at the expense of even the original words of the Gospel itself. [I do not condone any anti-Semitism and I do believe God has a purpose for the Jewish people as seen in Rm 9-11.]

Both of these foci are wrong. They add to the confusion, they are not dealing with the problem and do not glorify Jesus, but divert attention away from him. Our unifying feature is the recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as the head of his church. He wants us to focus upon his strategy in these times. What is it?

God's Strategy as revealed in the Bible

God's purposes do not change. They are eternal and his plan is being carefully worked out without faltering. Throughout history the church has known many ups and downs (mostly downs) but God always continued to receive testimony from faithful groups.³¹

The current church situation is serious and possibly unique in English history. The English church has known times of crisis before, but the sheer magnitude and diversity of what is going on, along with the confluence with other national cultural trends, causes great concern.³²

³¹ Read: *The Pilgrim Church* by E H Broadbent for more information on this.

³² I refer to current widespread deception originating at a leadership level, the easy importation of foreign erroneous teaching, dangerous false experiences, the corruption of Gnosticism, New Age ideas, occultic practices, multiplication of cults, authoritarian leadership, lack of clear Biblical direction, decline in church attendance etc. - all in the

This is all the more reason to understand what God is after, not what our ideas may be. There have been many knee-jerk reactions to error, but the time has come to be pro-active.

God's Man

Throughout the Bible God has centred his strategy upon a Man, upon his son Jesus Christ.³³ In the Old Testament we see him looked forward to with eyes of faith. We find Moses directing people to a future prophet, Isaiah to a suffering servant, Daniel to a son of man with glory and dominion, whilst various prophets point to God's shepherd and so on. Each of these was given a glimpse of some facet of the glory of Jesus. Thus the picture was gradually built up of God's anointed one (Messiah) who would redeem his people from their sins and establish God's kingdom. God's purpose for all Israel's ills was centred in a man, in Jesus; not a doctrine, a people, a ceremony, a system, a ruler or an idea, but a man, God's man.

In the Gospels we see Jesus claiming to be this man. He is the way the truth and the life. The kingdom is present when he is around. He is the door, the shepherd, the light. People find life in him. He is spiritual food and drink. He is the king. And here is the mystery which the prophets never understood fully, though he is a man, he is also God.

Jesus said that he had much more to say but the disciples could not cope with it (especially without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and so he promised to send the Holy Spirit to reveal further truth to them³⁴. The Holy Spirit would also glorify him, for the focus of the Spirit is always Jesus not something or someone else.³⁵ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. When the Holy Spirit acts, he is implementing the claims and decisions of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the disciples were promised that they would be led into truth by the Holy Spirit, they were also told that they would be reminded of important things that Jesus said³⁶ and learn more directly from heaven. The New Testament letters are thus the final words of Jesus to his people in this age. The full revelation of Jesus is to be found in the teaching of the apostles. They are conscious of this and Peter claims

supposed Evangelical church.

³³ Eph 3:11

³⁴ Jn 16:12-13

³⁵ Jn 16:14

³⁶ Jn 14:26

Paul's writings as scripture.³⁷

The church is now God's Man in Christ

A key feature of this apostolic teaching concerns the church. Paul calls it: *the church which is his body*.³⁸ When writing history, Luke says that the Gospels record what Jesus **began** to do and teach, the church is now what Jesus is doing since his ascension.³⁹ In fact, the sovereignty of God is devoted to the work in the church, Jesus is head over all: *for the church*⁴⁰. When Saul persecutes the church he is condemned by the Lord as persecuting *him*. Over 60 times Paul talks about Christians in terms like *in Christ* and similar. He uses expressions like: *You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. Christ is our life. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

The church is the body of Christ, and its goal is to mature - into what? To the stature of **a man**!⁴¹ The church is to be the manifestation of the risen Christ in the world.⁴² The church is now God's corporate man called to work out his purposes on the earth under the direction of the head, Christ. God's strategy has always been with this man - Christ, now it is Christ in corporate expression in **the church which is his body** through which the fulness of God's purpose and the pivot of all his plans are to be achieved.

This is the New Testament description of the strategy of God. God's purposes haven't changed, they centre on Christ and as such they focus today upon the church, the body of Christ. Any person wishing to discover the strategy of God in this time must discover the body. Any strategy which does not centre ultimately upon building the body is working against the purpose of God.

We need no mystical or super-spiritual confirmation of this in our hearts. We do not need to confirm this by discussion with other people. It is confirmed in large letters in the Bible. The question is: will we believe and obey what the Bible says? What we need is to recapture God's vision for his people and then commit our lives to praying, 'Thy

³⁷ 2 Pt 3:15-16

³⁸ Eph 1:22-23

³⁹ Acts 1:1

⁴⁰ Eph 1:22 (There is no intended reference here to the Manifest Sons of God heresy.)

⁴¹ Eph 2:15, 4:13

⁴² Eph 3:10

kingdom come' and doing all that we can to work with that vision.⁴³

Acts: an example

An example of this is the Book of Acts. It begins with a confirmation that what follows is the work of Christ from heaven. This is logical since only Jesus can build his church - we are simply to get in line with him.⁴⁴ What is Acts all about from Pentecost onwards? It concerns the building of the body, nothing else. The Holy Spirit takes up different men, Peter, Philip, Barnabus, Paul, and uses them in various geographical areas. Their task is to preach the Gospel and establish churches. Paul's letters give light on how these churches are structured, led, and gathered. We hear nothing of a renewal of society but rather of a rescue of people from it to serve God within it. We do not see an amalgamation with the state but a preparedness to die rather than give way to its claims. We do not see a focus upon Israel after the flesh but a straining to reach all known nations with the Gospel.⁴⁵ We do not see an elevation of leaders but a leadership devoted to nursing the flock and prepared to suffer for it.⁴⁶ Neither do we see para-church organisations. The church is God's vehicle for service. God may well be using them today due to the failure of the church, but they are not his declared means of reaching people.

The Modern UK Church Scene

We live in an age where the availability of Bibles and Christian ministry, [books, tapes, videos and teachers] is greater than at any other time in history. Why then do we rarely see a proper expression of the New Testament church? The truth is because the enemy will fight against this harder than any other subject. It is the one truth closest to God's heart for it concerns his own family and the outworking of his purpose. A Biblical church is the most dangerous weapon against Satan's wiles and manoeuvrings. He will stop at nothing to prevent such a church developing at all. Frequently, his adopted method is to propel an aspiring work too far. Some church leaders started with a vision of the New Testament church but ended up building cults. They did not originally aspire to develop rigid, authoritarian works, but the enemy pushed their ideas and experience of power into forbidden realms leading their people further and further into error.

The only way to build a *truly Biblical* church is to emphasise the New Testament principles of gathering: *koinonia*, plural equal elders, *body*

⁴³ My references to *kingdom* have no dominionist, triumphal, reconstructionist implications.

⁴⁴ Matt 16:18; Acts 2:47

⁴⁵ Rm 15:24,28

⁴⁶ 2 Cor 6:4-5, 8-9; 1 Thess 2:7

ministry, proper use of the spiritual gifts, mutual edification, spontaneous ministry, the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, focus upon the Lord's Supper, a serving spirit, outreach to the locality in love and good works as well as the words of the Gospel, preaching a Biblical Gospel, avoiding church buildings but meeting in homes as small communities of grace, restoration of the principle of personal worship, preparation for suffering, diversity in expression and so on.

God's Strategy For Us Now

Why are we in this situation?

We saw that in the early 70's God sovereignly raised up many autonomous house churches as people caught an understanding of koinonia. In the late 70's and early 80's, some of these groups grew and began to drift together forming into the streams we know today. In the late 80's they became rigidly organised and the leaders took on a growing authoritarian stance. The network of relationships between these leaders and international figures (particularly from the USA) led to an easy infiltration of foreign ideas and excesses.

Error developed through this rigid leadership system and the, (now sizeable) congregations gradually became passive and lazy, satisfied by emotional kicks in worship times and rarely thinking for itself. Church life became dominated by large gatherings given over to exuberant worship and authoritarian preaching in equal measures. In many cases, the current young generation in these churches have no experience of mutual ministries and 'body-life'.

Other church types not sucked into this method have often become even more entrenched in tradition, recognising the evils around them. Unfortunately, this often convinced them that their equally unbiblical position was valid, i.e: a boring, dull liturgy followed by an equally authoritarian sermon. It is the reverse of the same coin - no mutual ministries, no koinonia.

The original reaction of the house churches in the 70's to the staid traditionalism of the denominations was valid, but it foundered whenever it became focused upon men. As people looked to leaders it became fleshly and then worldly. Through many painful years, those seeking God's vision for the church and those recognising the errors, left their spiritual homes. Perhaps they do not realise what a great investment God has put into them.

God's Purpose in this

This painful time has taught many of them what to avoid and shown how easily the subtle approaches of the enemy take hold, even in sincere and godly men. They have learned, the hard way, the dangers of varying, in even the slightest degree, from God's Biblical plan for his people. Such folk will be very cautious in their participation in any future work and very alive to the dangers. As we approach the year 2000, we can see that God has prepared a very fertile ground for a genuine expression of the body according to his vision - if we are faithful.

Where do we go from here?

So much for a Biblical vision, but what are we to do about it? The mid-ground I mentioned at the beginning of this paper is beginning to fragment; not that there was ever any unity there, nor should we seek to build up another fleshly, superficial network. What is disconcerting is that groups are starting to pursue different agendas, some coming together to do this. Few or none are stating that their purpose is to discover the Biblical vision of 'the body of Christ' which I have described. Few seem concerned for a genuine restoration of the church. Many seem to be so disillusioned by authoritarian networks that they now have given up on 'church' altogether, some settling for a bunker remnant mentality.

Whilst we have much sympathy with these disillusioned people, we must stick to God's purpose and truth or we are in no better position than those from whom we have withdrawn. The mid-ground Christians must start seeking and praying for a vision of the body to grip those who follow Christ and ask God to build them into it somewhere. Perhaps the time has come for small conferences to share God's word on this matter.

I hope that I have said enough to strike a nerve and trust that we will see a genuine move of the Holy Spirit to build 'family' churches according to the mind of God. May we all be faithful in this work. I live in hope.

Conclusion

We have noted that large differences often exist between the scriptures and traditional church practices. What action must now be taken if we want to get back to normal Biblical church life?

What is needed is a complete paradigm shift on behalf of the Lord's people. Is this possible? I believe it is. Time and again in history God has renewed his witness in the midst of spiritual darkness. We must remember that this is God's work, not ours, it does not depend upon our best efforts, Jesus builds his church. The most important thing is not to stand in his way by working in the flesh, but get in line with Him.

Having said that, I want to suggest some practical advice for leaders wanting to become more Biblical in their church practice.

- * In an established church where the people have a heart to get in line with God, do not try to do everything at once. It will take time to change from modern practice to something completely Biblical.
- * Spiritual knowledge is crucial. Teach this and keep on teaching it. The people must understand what the Biblical position is, they cannot move beyond their conscience. Explain the vision of the New Testament church as clearly as you can.
- * Pray, pray and pray some more. Having seen the vision we must call upon the Lord to fulfil it in our nation. We need grace above all else. The early church was a place where *great grace was upon them all*. We need God's help, mercy and supply if we are to do anything useful.
- * If you are not committed to an established church, seek God about meeting informally with other brothers and sisters. Do not force this, only Jesus can build his church. Perhaps meet simply to break bread and pray for the vision after an informal meal. Trust God to work and follow his leading.
- * If you already have a small group and want to move on, do not attempt new things in your own strength and wisdom. Do not try to initiate everything in this booklet overnight. Do that which encourages koinonia, for instance meet together for a communal meal before gathering before the Lord. Let the body emerge naturally and without constraint.

- * Always look to the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit in plans and in meetings. Have faith that he can open situations impossible to you.
- * Be flexible within the bounds of scripture. Do not expect to function just like everyone else does.
- * When those with clear ministry gifts are emerging, encourage them to serve and support them.
- * When the Lord is making it clear to the body that certain men should be elders, they should be formally committed to that task and recognised in their ministry.
- * Elders should avoid formalities at all costs. For instance: continue those things which make for fellowship. If you have to meet in a rented hall, ensure that chairs are laid out in a circle wherever possible (it is amazing how many well meaning churches struggle with this). No one should take a prominent place unless sharing ministry of some sort so that all may hear. Make sure that you encourage the weak especially, do not leave anyone out.

Finally, if God so allows and a new group emerges, **it is vital that an elitist attitude is avoided**. None of us is better than anyone else and Christians in other churches are our brothers and sisters. It is helpful to have a service mentality towards other churches, other believers and the needs around us to enhance an attitude of equality. If we feel that God has blessed us in our church order, then we should seek to serve those around us, especially the household of God (Gal 6:10). The greatest way this serving spirit will manifest itself is evangelism. A Biblical church will make every effort to reach the lost with God's message of salvation in Christ alone. The true test of our church life is steady growth through personal witness in everyday situations.

Appendix One

The 55 *One Another* NT Texts

Mk 9:50	Be at peace with one another
Jn 13:34	Love one another
Jn 13:34	Love one another
Jn 15:12	Love one another
Jn 15:17	Love one another
Rm 12:5	Members of one another
Rm 12:10	Love one another with brotherly affection
Rm 12:10	Prefer one another
Rm 12:16	Be of the same mind towards one another
Rm 13:8	Love one another
Rm 14:13	Do not judge one another
Rm 15:15	Be likeminded towards one another
Rm 15:7	Receive one another
Rm 15:14	Admonish one another
Rm 16:16	Greet one another
1 Cor 4:6	Do not be puffed up in favour one to another
1 Cor 12:25	Have the same care one for another
1 Cor 16:20	Greet one another
2 Cor 13:12	Greet one another
Gal 5:13	By love serve one another
Gal 5:15	Do not be consumed one for another
Gal 5:26	Do not provoke one another
Eph 4:2	Forbear one another in love
Eph 4:25	We are members of one another
Eph 4:32	Be kind to one another
Eph 5:21	Submit to one another
Col 3:9	Do not lie to one another
Col 3:13	Forbear one another
Col 3:13	Forgive one another
Col 3:16	Admonish one another in psalms
1 Thess 3:12	Abound in love one toward another
1 Thess 4:9	Love one another
1 Thess 4:18	Comfort one another
1 Thess 5:11	Edify one another
1 Tim 5:21	Do not prefer one before another
Heb 3:18	Exhort one another
Heb 10:24	Provoke one another to love and good works

Heb 10:25	Exhort one another
Jm 4:11	Do not speak evil one of another
Jm 5:9	Do not hold grudges one to another
Jm 5:16	Confess your faults one to another
Jm 5:16	Pray for one another
1 Pt 1:22	Love one another with a pure heart
1 Pt 3:8	Have compassion one of another
1 Pt 4:9	Be hospitable one to another
1 Pt 4:10	Minister to one another
1 Pt 5:5	Be subject to one another
1 Pt 5:14	Greet one another
1 Jn 1:7	We have fellowship one with another
1 Jn 3:11	Love one another
1 Jn 3:23	Love one another
1 Jn 4:7	Love one another
1 Jn 4:11	Love one another
1 Jn 4:12	If we love one another God dwells in us
2 Jn 5	Love one another

Love one another 15 times - [the no. of *grace* (5) x the no. of *God* (3)]

Greet one another	4 times	- [the <i>universal</i> no.]
Edify / exhort one another	3 times	
Care / compassion / kindness	3 times	
Be subject to one another	2 times	[1 Pt 5:5; Eph 5:21]
Serve one another	2 times	[1 Pt 4:10; Gal 5:13]
Admonish one another	2 times	[Col 3:16; Rm 15:14]
Forbear one another	2 times	[Col 3:13; Eph 4:2]
Members of one another	2 times	[Rm 12:5; Eph 4:25]
Same mind / like mind	2 times	[Rm 12:16, 15:15]

Once only

Have fellowship one with another
 Be at peace with one another
 Prefer one another
 Do not judge one another
 Receive one another
 Do not be puffed up in favour one to another
 Do not be consumed one for another
 Do not provoke one another
 Do not lie to one another

Forgive one another
Comfort one another
Do not prefer one before another
Provoke one another to love and good works
Do not speak evil one of another
Do not hold grudges one to another
Confess your faults one to another
Pray for one another
Be hospitable one to another

Appendix Two

What is Biblical 'Koinonia'?

We must first establish that the principle of koinonia, or fellowship,⁴⁷ is a Biblical priority in the life of the local church.

- ❑ We are commanded to fellowship with each other in a meaningful way (1 Jn 1:7; Heb 10:25)
 - In service (1 Pt 4:10)
 - In edification (1 Thess 5:11)
 - In care (1 Thess 4:18)
 - In union (Rm 12:5)
 - In love (Rm 13:8)
 - In like-mindedness (Rm 15:15)
 - In receiving each other (Rm 15:17)
 - In admonition (Rm 15:14)
 - In confession of faults (Jm 5:16)
 - In prayer (Jm 5:16)
 - In subjection (1 Pt 5:5)
- ❑ The apostolic practice was to fellowship together informally in homes (Acts 2:42,46, 20:7-11)
- ❑ The enabling of the body to function requires open fellowship (1 Cor 12:4-31)
- ❑ Paul's doctrine of the church is based on 'when you come together' (1 Cor 11:18,33,14:26). At this time every one has the opportunity to minister as the Holy Spirit directs (1 Cor 12:4-6, 14:26) Paul says that this is 'a command of the Lord' it is so important (1 Cor 14:37).

It is clear that fellowship is not only important, but it is an integral and vital part of church life. It is a central feature that cannot be eliminated from the normal meeting of the whole church. It must not be relegated to a different meeting of the church at another time of the week when all are not present.

What does Koinonia mean?

⁴⁷ There is another word translated as 'fellowship' in the New Testament, this is *metoche*. It is more restricted than *koinonia* and only occurs twice (2 Cor 6:14; Lk 5:10). It also means partnership or fellowship in terms of close association or common interest.

In a nutshell it means: 'participation' and occurs 19 times. The root word *koinos* means 'common', 'belonging equally to several', and other cognates (related words) include the noun *koinonos* ('partner') and the verb *koinoneo* ('to have a share', 'to have in common'). Koinonia is best expressed in the word picture of a group of people gathering for a picnic, each one bringing a contribution. All bring something different so that when they eat, everyone has something of everything and enjoys a much better varied meal than their single contribution.

Koinonia means: close association, community, communion, joint participation, intimacy, having a share in something and giving a share to something. It is a relationship of people involving active participation in a common interest together. Examples of this type of sharing include: business partnership (Lk 5:10), a share in blessings (1 Cor 9:23), religious partnership (1 Cor 10:18), involvement in another's sufferings and comfort (2 Cor 1:7), sharing in grace (Phil 1:7), and contributing to needs (Rm 12:13, 15:26). Koinonia is used of active co-operative participation between a giver and receiver.

Therefore, being called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9) does not just mean being gathered into God's family, but our calling to **share fellowship** with Jesus Christ.

Implications for church life

We can now extrapolate what this means in our life together as believers in the local assembly of the Body of Christ. We can see this as follows:

- Intimacy
 - ◆ Family atmosphere
 - ◆ Open sharing of needs and knowledge
 - ◆ Care and kindness
 - ◆ Small meetings (i.e. 'family-sized' so koinonia can be practised freely)
- Participation
 - ◆ Use of wise Spiritual gifts for edification
 - ◆ Encouragement for all to share and be involved
- Giving and receiving
 - ◆ Bearing one another's burdens
 - ◆ Caring for one another
- Love
 - ◆ Openness to one another
 - ◆ No judgmental/critical attitude

- ◆ Delighting in one another
- ☐ One anothering
 - ◆ Please refer to list in appendix 1
- ☐ Mutual ministries
 - ◆ No special *rank* of ministers
 - ◆ Edifying one another
 - ◆ Admonishing one another
 - ◆ Body ministry
- ☐ Organic meetings not institutions
 - ◆ Church based on life not formal meetings
 - ◆ Life based on relationships (with God and each other)
 - ◆ Flexibility
 - ◆ Diversity
- ☐ Non-assertive leadership
 - ◆ No elevation of ministerial authority
 - ◆ No focus on leadership
 - ◆ Leadership is there when necessary it is not dominant
- ☐ Interdependence
 - ◆ Meeting one another's practical needs
 - ◆ Sharing of spiritual and practical resources
- ☐ Interactivity
 - ◆ Involvement with each other
 - ◆ No passivity
 - ◆ No indolence

This list could be developed further, but I think the point is made. These activities and attitudes arise from the word *koinonia*, at least by implication; in addition, they are all backed up by scriptural examples and principles.

Surely it must now be accepted that *koinonia* is crucial to New Testament shared life in the church of Christ. It cannot be dismissed, and it cannot be relegated to a minor meeting. The practice of *koinonia* is vital to a Biblical expression of church. Without it, we die.

Appendix Three

Vital Principles of the NT Church

People Issues

- ❑ **Koinonia**
 - ◆ The body functions on the basis of fellowship (sharing).⁴⁸
 - ◆ This includes: interdependency, participation in all matters, bearing one another's burdens, ministry etc.
- ❑ **Every member available to function** ⁴⁹
 - ◆ under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ **Freedom to use genuine spiritual gifts** ⁵⁰
 - ◆ under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- ❑ **Meetings are small enough to gather in a home.**⁵¹
 - ◆ Obviously different sized gatherings require different sized homes. If no suitable accommodation is available, hire of a small hall may be required.
 - ◆ Care should be taken not to be tempted to let the church grow too large for the principles of *koinonia* and leadership to operate.
- ❑ **Members are local** ⁵²
 - ◆ the definition of *local* will vary in differing circumstances.
- ❑ **Membership is not formal** ⁵³
 - ◆ As we are members of each other, formal commitment of loyalty to the leadership in writing, submitting to a prescribed statute is inappropriate.
 - ◆ Commitment should be shown by service to the body and obedience to the Lord.
- ❑ **Individual development is by discipling (apprenticeship) throughout the body**
 - ◆ e.g: older women training young wives⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Acts 2:42, 4:32; 1 Cor 12

⁴⁹ 1 Cor 14:26

⁵⁰ 1 Cor 12:4-12

⁵¹ Philemon 2; Col 4:15; Acts 2:46

⁵² Titus 1:5 'town'.

⁵³ There is no record of such in the NT

⁵⁴ Titus 2:3-5

- ◆ e.g: leaders train gifted men ⁵⁵

Leadership Issues

- ❑ **Leadership of plural / equal elders.** ⁵⁶
 - ◆ All will have the gift of shepherding (pastoring) and all will be able to teach in some manner (this does not mean able to preach a sermon); especially one to one ministry.
 - ◆ Only men can serve in this role. ⁵⁷
- ❑ **Major decisions are arrived at by consensus** ⁵⁸
- ❑ **Genuine gifted men are able to speak into the church** ⁵⁹
 - ◆ these are evangelists, prophets and teachers.⁶⁰
 - ◆ Apostles will minister into new church situations and have an ongoing fathering/nursing role,⁶¹ for a while, in churches they have planted. They will not be the only ones serving, other gifts will have input as the Lord directs. No one man dominates a local church. ⁶²
- ❑ **Genuine gifted men are able to be sent from the church** ⁶³
 - ◆ these are apostles, teachers, prophets and evangelists.
- ❑ **Very few ministers are full-time in their service.** ⁶⁴
 - ◆ These will be men that minister the word in various forms to wider groups beyond the locality (teachers, evangelists, apostles, prophets).
 - ◆ Occasionally a shepherd who teaches may need to devote all his time to the flock if it is large.⁶⁵
 - ◆ Payment of leaders should be done in faith. Salaries should be avoided. Men should seek God for their needs in faith.
 - ◆ Giving should be encouraged in the flock.
 - ◆ Elders should give to the needs that God gives priority to. This may or may not be full-time workers.
 - ◆ Men receiving money for full-time work should have no involvement in the financial process.

⁵⁵ 2 Tim 2:1-2, 1:13; 1 Tim 1:2,18, 6:20 'my son'.

⁵⁶ There is no mention of *senior pastor* in the NT, Titus 1:5 (elders-plural); 1 Tim 3:1-7

⁵⁷ 1 Tim 3:2 ('husband')

⁵⁸ Acts 15:22

⁵⁹ Eph 4:11-12

⁶⁰ Acts 13:1-4

⁶¹ 1 Thess 2:7

⁶² 1 Cor 3:5-6, 10-15, 4:6

⁶³ Acts 8:4, 13:1-4

⁶⁴ 1 Thess 2:9

⁶⁵ 1 Tim 5:17-18

- ❑ **The goal of leadership is to release people to function in their gifts(s) and mature in Christ.**⁶⁶
- ❑ **Deacons should be appointed to deal with various matters under the direction of elders**⁶⁷
 - ◆ e.g. practical issues and meeting the needs of the poor and needy.
 - ◆ Deacons can be men or women.⁶⁸

Meeting Issues

- ❑ **The Lord's Supper is a primary focus of the gathered church.**⁶⁹
- ❑ **Meetings are open**
 - ◆ to contributions by any genuine Christian operating under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (not subjective feelings).⁷⁰
- ❑ **The sermon is not the focus of the meeting.**⁷¹
- ❑ **There should be public reading of scripture.**⁷²
- ❑ **Teaching God's word is of crucial importance.**⁷³
 - ◆ As such, time should be made available for a proper interaction with the ministry of it. This could be done by a teaching session followed by questions, answers and discussion; either mid-week or after the 'family-service'. Subjects for further teaching will arise from this.
- ❑ **The spiritual gifts will operate in the gathered church meeting.**⁷⁴
- ❑ **The motivating factor in ministry of all sorts is love.**⁷⁵
- ❑ **The goal of ministry is edification.**⁷⁶
- ❑ **Worship will take place in the gathered church.**
 - ◆ However, worship is not the primary purpose, edification is.
 - ◆ True worship is not outward or excessively emotional, but is a genuine giving of the heart to God in adoration and commitment to service.⁷⁷
- ❑ **Gathering for prayer will be a key focus of the gathered**

⁶⁶ Eph 4:9-16

⁶⁷ Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13

⁶⁸ 1 Tim 3:11

⁶⁹ Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 11:17, 20

⁷⁰ 1 Cor 14:26-31

⁷¹ There is no mention of it in 1 Cor 14.

⁷² 1 Tim 4:13

⁷³ 1 Tim 4:13

⁷⁴ 1 Cor 12, 14; Rm 12:4-8

⁷⁵ 1 Cor 13

⁷⁶ 1 Cor 14:3,12,26,31

⁷⁷ Rm 12:1

church.⁷⁸

- ◆ Although this is an intimate part of the life of the church, it may not always necessarily be best to delegate its practice to a separate meeting. It should be part of the life of the church in all its forms. Specific crises may require specific prayer meetings.⁷⁹
- ❑ **Flexibility will be a watchword of the church's ministry and practice.**⁸⁰
- ❑ **Avoid formalism, institutionalism, legalism, sacerdotalism.**
- ❑ **The church is an organism not an organisation.**⁸¹

Strategy

- ❑ **The Holy Spirit should be allowed to build and direct as he chooses.**⁸²
 - ◆ The key is to find God's will together.
 - ◆ One individual's strategy should not be continually undertaken without discussion or clear direction from the Lord, no matter how gifted the man is.
 - ◆ Be flexible, at the Lord's discretion.
- ❑ **Work through and by community.**⁸³
- ❑ **Diversity should be expected, allowed and encouraged.**⁸⁴
 - ◆ For example, a leader could be called: a shepherd, a pastor, an elder, a bishop, an overseer, an administrator, a helmsman, a presbyter as well as a leader, and they would all be Biblical.
 - ◆ In individual expression in local meetings.
 - ◆ In differing expressions of church plantings.
 - ◆ In different styles of the same essential gift⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Acts 2:42

⁷⁹ Acts 12:12

⁸⁰ For instance: church leaders are called elders but also bishops (Acts 20:17 with 28; Titus 1:5-7). Some letters to churches do not mention elders at all (e.g: 1 Cor). Philip is sent to one missionary situation by a persecution, to another by a miracle. God is variable in his methods, as we follow the Holy Spirit, who is like the wind and cannot be pigeon-holed, we must also learn to be flexible under God and not rigid in our approach.

⁸¹ 1 Cor 12

⁸² He implements Christ's strategy Matt 16:18

⁸³ The church is a family, a household: Gal 6:10; Eph 2:9

⁸⁴ See all the *one another* texts.

⁸⁵ Note that the same doctrine is taught in scripture through many differing forms (parable, figure, narrative, teaching etc.) by many different character types, and yet it retains a unity of thought under God's sovereignty.

- Never employ worldly methods.**⁸⁶
- The body will be involved in major decisions.**⁸⁷
- Growth is achieved by community:**⁸⁸
 - ◆ in individuals ⁸⁹
 - ◆ in churches by cell division

The Goal

- To glorify Jesus.**⁹⁰
- To be a living testimony to Jesus in the locality.**⁹¹
- To preach the gospel.** ⁹²
- To move out in the locality through acts of love.**⁹³
- To reproduce churches.**⁹⁴
- To see everyone mature to their fulness in Christ.**⁹⁵
- To relieve suffering.**⁹⁶

⁸⁶ 2 Cor 10:3-4

⁸⁷ Acts 15:22

⁸⁸ Acts 2:42-46, 4:32

⁸⁹ Eph 4:13-16

⁹⁰ Eph 3:10

⁹¹ Eph 3:9-10

⁹² 1 Pt 2:9

⁹³ Gal 6:10; Col 1:10; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:10; 2 Thess 2:17; 1 Tim 5:10; 2 Tim 2:21; Titus 2:7

⁹⁴ Acts 6:7, **16:5**

⁹⁵ Col 1:28-29

⁹⁶ Gal 6:10

Appendix Four

Worship

No serious Bible student would doubt that worship is of prime importance to the believer. It is why we were created and what we will everlastingly pursue in heaven. In fact an early description of Christians is that they were genuine worshippers of God (Phil 3:3). Since this is true, worship will inevitably form a significant part of the church meetings; but to what extent? This is an area where more work needs to be done and I simply offer some thoughts.

In the 1970's, when God sovereignly raised up independent house churches of all sorts, though flawed in many cases, it was the initiation of something fresh in practical ecclesiology in the UK and edification through koinonia was paramount. As the years progressed these groups became identified with one or another 'stream' or folded up completely. Though some independent fellowships may still exist, the majority fit into this pattern. As these networks developed more rigid forms of church meeting something else happened which mollified the people. It could be presumed that the loss of body ministry in these organised churches would have devastated members - but it did not, why?

With the growth of Restorationism, the Charismatic churches also developed a new style of worship which is now endemic. Worship in many Charismatic and Renewal churches follows a pattern which has largely been adapted from an original form found in Vineyard churches. This format emphasises a flowing of music to enhance religious feelings. Others (e.g. Dave and Dale Garratt) had also pioneered in this area and flowing songs together quickly became a feature of UK churches. The result of this, when led well, usually requiring a musician, is that people have very powerful emotional experiences and feel satisfied by a meeting containing such worship, even if their participation has been non-existent. They did not miss body ministry because emotional worship replaced it.

We need to look at this more carefully.

Wimber's main thrust deserves serious consideration: it is that worship should provide an opportunity for people to give God the adoration of

their hearts, to have an emotional interaction with God. This is obviously valid, though it is not the only aspect of worship and flowing songs are not the only way to do it. This emphasis, unfortunately, paved the way for a style to emerge which became mere emotional entertainment. In restoring a balance, the pendulum swung too far. In practice, some significant problems are now in evidence in churches where this style of worship is followed:

- ❑ Worship is now seen by most as a corporate thing only.
 - ◆ The Biblical emphasis is that worship is personal and involves life-commitment.
 - ◆ Worship is to be experienced continually, not just on Sundays.
- ❑ Worship is only experienced when led from the front.
- ❑ Worship always involves music:
 - ◆ It is often felt, if not stipulated, that the better the music the better the worship.
 - ◆ Worship times have become dominated by musicians.
 - ◆ Unhelpful influences like unbalanced sounds detrimentally affect the congregation. This is especially true of loud drums.
 - ◆ To aid the flow, worship leaders / musicians find it easier to stay in one musical key per segment since it requires no musical bridges or abrupt changes. This can lead to the choice of songs being determined by keys or musical ability and frequently songs are joined together that are completely inappropriate in content. This was a particular failing of Vineyard conferences. In other words, truth ceases to be the driver of the flow of worship.
- ❑ Meetings are assessed on the basis of the worship not the effect of edification of the word in fellowship.
 - ◆ The topic of discussion after a meeting is usually the worship not the sermon.
 - ◆ The feelings aroused by the meeting are dominated by the worship not fellowship.
 - ◆ A meeting with 'poor' worship but solid truth and fellowship is likely to be viewed as unsuccessful.
- ❑ The model being followed is an Old Testament one not a New Testament one.
- ❑ People begin to treat the worship time like an addictive fix. If they have attended a time of worship in the week they feel fine, if not they feel low and out of sorts with God.
- ❑ People find it hard to leave churches that they know are in serious error, even scandalous, because they can go nowhere else to

worship in this fashion. Truth has failed to be the decision making factor in their walk with God. It is thought better to follow lies and dangerous practice in order to have this experience every week. Some who manage to leave find themselves in a spiritual doldrums for a long period due to not being able to worship in this fashion, a sort of 'cold-turkey' experience.

- ❑ In extreme cases where the worship leader / musician (s) are effective, it is possible to completely hypnotise an audience and take them wherever you want to go. If the leader is ungodly or proud the danger of deception is serious.
- ❑ Effective manipulation (even if unintentional) of the worship time can soften up a congregation to succumb to subsequent false teaching or experiences later in the meeting. Their guard is let down.

I feel that the time has come to question this whole situation.

- ❑ The New Testament does not highlight the place of worship in a church meeting, as we have seen. Therefore, to give at least half of the time together over it seems questionable.
- ❑ Prayer is seen to be a key factor of corporate life in the New Testament yet is clearly less significant to modern Christians than worship.
- ❑ Subjective emotionalism has replaced objective truth.
- ❑ There is no indication that the New Testament church used music to underline its worship times.
- ❑ There is very little evidence that music was in widespread use in the early church until after the second century. Even after this time some important church leaders actually condemned the use of music in worship: e.g. John Chrysostom

In keeping with his era, John favoured 'a cappella'⁹⁷ singing in worship and opposed the use of musical instruments. Instruments were used in the Old Testament to entice people to attend worship, he said, but Christians shouldn't need such inducements.⁹⁸

Having said all this we need to apply wisdom. To suddenly stop using music to encourage worship would not help us. I believe that in churches meeting in houses in the New Testament fashion it is possible, and perhaps helpful, to worship 'a cappella'. However, we have become much less used to communal singing than our forefathers and probably need assistance, at least for a while. Simple

⁹⁷ Vocal music without instrumental accompaniment.

⁹⁸ Kevin Dale Miller on John Chrysostom (349-407), Christian History Vol XIII, no 44.

musical accompaniment will no doubt help people to 'get in gear'.

This should help those many groups which have no musicians and feel very inadequate as a result. There is no need to feel this way at all. Unaccompanied singing gives total opportunity for *koinonia* in worship. Anyone can start a song, at any point (under the Spirit's guidance), in any key. If the content moves someone to continue, the next song will be determined, hopefully, more by content than key signatures. This enables complete flexibility and submission to the Holy Spirit in a time of worship.

This was the practice of Jesus (Mk 14:26) and should release us into a much deeper experience of worship in community than is possible under the present system.

Appendix Five

Membership of the Local Church

*For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.
(1 Cor 12:13)*

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor 1:9)

To what degree do we need to formally commit ourselves to a church? Should we sign a pledge of membership? Do we need to submit to church leaders in writing? Should only members be allowed to participate in meetings? Can only members hold office? Should a prospective member undergo a commitment course of some kind? Do members have to subscribe to a detailed statement of belief imposed by the church? These are the sorts of questions all church plantings have to consider. Both the traditional churches and the New Churches answer in the affirmative. But is this right?

The fact is that there is not one scrap of Biblical evidence to support any of them!

Most churches will be concerned about order; that is reasonable. Unfortunately, this usually transforms itself into ensuring that church members are submissive to the leaders. Written commitment and public confessions of loyalty to the leaders are often required. This immediately puts the focus of new members (and the church seeing these regular events) upon men. The commitment is to men, the stability relies upon men, any transgression is against men; yet in the New Testament the commitment is to God (1 Cor 1:2) and the brethren (Acts 4:32), stability is in the hands of Jesus (Matt 16:18) and transgression is against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3,9).

Like everything else in church life, membership should be organic and relational, not formal. Scripture clearly points to this in that we never read of being members of the church but only members of one another, subject to one another:

- **We are members of one another** (Rm 12:5)
- **We are members of one another** (Eph 4:25)
- **Receive one another** (Rm 15:7)

- **Submit to one another** (Eph 5:21)
- **Be subject to one another** (1 Pt 5:5)
- **Do not prefer one before another** (1 Tim 5:21)
- **Have fellowship one with another** (1 Jn 1:7)

All Christians are received by God and should be received by each other without formality. In fact there is no New Testament thought of *joining* a church at all,⁹⁹ because we are already joined to each other in the life of Christ. We do not join our limbs to our bodies to become members of them, they comprise our bodies. We can dismember them but not join them. We are to ***‘keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’*** (Eph 4:3), not establish it.

The church is a called out company of people (*ekklesia*) who are ***‘fitly framed together’*** (‘joined together’ RSV, Eph 2:21). Who fitly framed these people together? Not man but God, who built us into the Body of Christ (Eph 2:22: see section from 2:11). If we are all fitly framed together like the boards of the tabernacle, then we do not need men to frame us together in some formal manner.

There is no bar to fellowship or participation in church meetings in the New Testament, excepting life in Christ and the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. To reject an offering by a ‘non-member’ in a meeting could be to work against the Holy Spirit. What God has joined together, man has no right to put asunder.

But what about commitment?

In the New Testament, commitment is worked out in life, not by signing a piece of paper. Genuine members show that they are such by expressing commitment in what they do: taking responsibility, participating, caring, working etc. Can anyone honestly claim that formal commitment ensures a living expression of it? Usually the reverse is the case. It is a demonstration of love that identifies one as a disciple (Jn 13:35) not a piece of paper. Genuine believers will ***‘devote themselves to the apostle’s doctrine and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer’*** (Acts 2:42). Where there is no desire to do this, one must question whether there is real life.

Does not exclusion imply formal membership?

⁹⁹ The word *join* (‘to glue or stick things together’) does appear in connection with the church in Acts 9:26-28 and 5:12-14. This is not used in the formal sense of the church joining people to it, but is a simple verb describing people who wanted or did not want to attach themselves to the brethren.

There is no conflict between the position I am describing and excommunication. When a person has committed gross public sin and disciplinary methods have failed (Matt 18:15-17), then exclusion from the church is the final step (1 Cor 5:4-6,13). This does not pre-suppose a membership roll, it simply means that such a one is cast out of the local church and is treated as an unbeliever. Any attempt to return without repentance is prevented. If churches are in homes this is no difficulty at all.

Are acceptance courses irrelevant?

Obviously there is a need for a church to have some kind of introductory system to:

- check that prospective members are believers
- check that there is no sound reason for restricting membership from this person (for instance if he had been excommunicated from a previous church for gross sin and had not repented)
- introduce leadership and workers
- ensure that the church's doctrinal position (of essentials) is understood
- give knowledge of practical meeting issues.

BUT it is much better that any introductory discipling is carried out on a one to one basis (like any other discipling). If New Testament churches are relatively small, there is no reason why new people interested in joining the church cannot be looked after by an individual (not necessarily an elder) and cared for relationally. This trusted brother (for men) or sister (for ladies) can establish a person's position in God, explain basic doctrinal positions, develop a friendship, explain church practices, etc, all in the informal surroundings of a front room over coffee. If it is discovered that there is a serious problem, then the elders can be called in to take over and deal with the issue.

This is much better than gathering a group of people together and dealing with the issues in a meeting format. What happens when various people cannot attend and miss significant evenings. In winter one can expect significant drop off rates, especially with older people. [Would it not be better for old folk to be visited at home? Is it loving to drag them out for an additional meeting every week in winter?] A formal introductory meeting bodes ill for an organic church, it speaks about the very opposite of what such a church should stand for. The organic church should be flexible, focusing upon individuals and their different needs in becoming part of the local body. A specific course is inflexible and treats everyone the same and takes no account of specific

weaknesses in learning or relating.

However, there could be an occasion for a meeting being necessary - that is during an unusual evangelistic or revival situation which has brought in many converts and seekers. In this case larger numbers may be involved and a meeting might be needed to cope. In this case it should be arranged to be as organic as possible with much feedback and discussion, not platform oratory.

Order

The church must conduct her affairs decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). Elders will take care that membership is dealt with properly, but as fathers not as managers. This order will reflect in the life of the church (Col 2:5), the word here means *arrangement* or *rank structure*. Ministry in these Colossian meetings was composed and efficient. Membership was clear and conspicuous, not by certificates, but personal expression and commitment.

What about unbelievers?

The church family consists of believers only (1 Cor 5:12-13), however, non-Christians who are seeking God will be brought along by friends, as God leads, and should be made welcome. We see this in 1 Cor 14:24-25. A home is made for a family and belongs to them, but that does not prevent people entering that home as guests, who may stay for some time. A church operating organically which is not too large will have no difficulty dealing with this and knowing who is who. Remember that there is no such thing in scripture as 'public worship' where any one can come in off the street and do whatever they like, without invitation. Our testimony of a holy life and our Gospel preaching is public, but not our worship or fellowship meeting.

Conclusion

A member of Christ's church is a member of every church and needs no approval of men to participate. Elders should take care not to exclude folk without good reason.