

The Upside-Down Church

We have published many papers demonstrating the simple fact that the modern church is, largely, so unbiblical that it would be unrecognisable to a Biblical apostle if he were alive today. In this paper I want to be as concise and focused as possible in demonstrating how the errors of the modern churches affect virtually everything in the Christian life; many features being the opposite of the Biblical principle.

Church Structures

Buildings

The Biblical church had no dedicated buildings for meetings. This was decided for a good reason (they were available for rent). Small churches meeting in homes are conducive to all the features required in the church: mutual fellowship of all, intimacy, openness, friendship, informal meetings, open participation, low-key leadership like a father etc. Once a church meets in a building it is almost impossible to maintain these features and the problems begin to multiply.

As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house. Acts 8:3

Greet the church that is in their house. Rm 16:5

Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. 1 Cor 16:19

*Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house. Col 4:15*

To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house. Phm 1:2

Modern churches, in almost every case, meet in dedicated buildings and leaders are often motivated to get bigger and better buildings because it boosts their authority and reputation.

The modern practice is the opposite of the Biblical practice. Apostolic churches are small and spread abroad over a wide area and are hidden to the world (like salt, as Jesus prophesied). Modern churches gather large numbers from a wide area into a single building and concentrate them all together and are visible to the world. Apostolic churches have many pastors over small churches in a region; the modern practice is one pastor gathering many people under him.

Denominations

There are no denominations in the New Testament but only one body of Christ. All denominations have formed from the fragmentation of the church, especially after the Reformation, due to individuals gathering people around a certain teaching or emphasis of practice. Many modern denominations, especially of the Charismatic variety, originally formed to oppose denominationalism but found themselves forming a new one as the movement hardened around a certain man.

Denominations can be avoided in the future if churches are built simply, meeting in homes and gathered under a team of equal elders. House churches can have fellowship with other

house churches and support one another without forming formal associations under a key leader. Apostolic teaching knows nothing of a man leading even one church let alone many.

Leadership is equal and plural

The leadership of a mature Biblical church is by a team of equal elders and no one else. There is no other apostolic form of church leadership. Any person claiming to be a spiritual leader of a church who is something other than an ordinary elder is a liar and a fraud.

Elders are always plural (unless the church is growing and too small to have generated sufficient leaders) and there is no such thing as a senior pastor or 'minister'. Everybody is a minister and all the elders are equal in authority. All the elders are pastors (shepherds). The various terms for leader in the NT all refer to elders, whether it is bishop (overseer), shepherd, pastor, leader, ruler or anything else. The reason for this is to ensure that no one man comes to dominate the church, which is the easiest way for Satan to control a church by deceiving one man.

- Churches are to appoint elders, not an elder. Note the plural form in Acts 20:17 (Ephesus) 21:18 (Jerusalem); Titus 1:5 (Crete).
- The terms 'elder' and 'bishop' are synonymous: Titus 1:5 with 1:7; Acts 20:17 with 20:28 (*episkopos* 'overseer' = 'bishop'). Jews favoured the term 'elder', which was part of their culture and synagogue structure; Greeks preferred the term 'overseer'.
- The function of elders is to shepherd ('pastor') and to teach (Eph 4:11). Shepherding is a description of what elders do - they care for the flock. The key tasks of a shepherd are to feed the sheep and defend them from predators. Both are crucial.
- Leaders are repeatedly warned not to have an authoritarian attitude over the flock (1 Pt 5:2-3; 2 Cor 1:24)
- We are specifically told by Jesus to avoid giving special titles to church leaders (Matt 23:8-10).

On the contrary, the modern church (of all stripes) is led by a single man, often called a pastor, or minister, or some other title of honour (something Jesus forbade). Though this man is sometimes called the 'first among equals', in practice it is a single figure in control. Sometimes the senior pastor has a team of elders who pay lip service to being a team but in reality the senior pastor is the man who determines the strategy for the church and does the bulk of the ministry. In a larger church this man may have an associate pastor to help him, another figure above the ordinary elders and also completely unbiblical.

More commonly, especially in Charismatic churches, the dominant leader is not 'first among equals' but is lauded as the top of a hierarchical pyramid, often given an authoritarian title such as an apostle, prophet, bishop, archbishop or such like. It is not uncommon to hear this man claim to be the mouthpiece of God whom everyone is called to submit to.

The very thing that apostolic teaching strived to avoid in the church (authoritarianism of one man) is what the church has built.

The objective of leadership

The goal of true leadership is centred upon the development of the people as a shepherd is focused upon feeding and protecting the flock. Everything a leader does should have its controlling purpose set upon helping, caring for, developing, nurturing, aiding, protecting and educating the people. The church is simply a gathering of the people together and the purpose of leadership is to help them grow more into Christ and be useful to God in

ministry. The basic word to describe leadership ministry is 'equipping'; they are to equip the saints by training them to perform the tasks that God gives them.

[Leadership is] for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Eph 4:12-13

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. ... give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. ... Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. 1 Tim 4:6, 13, 16

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine. Titus 2:1

The modern church senior leader, in reality (despite claims otherwise), is not focused upon developing ministry in his people that would do him out of a job. A sincere pastor may well be caring to the sheep and counsel them effectively (but even this is unusual; it is increasingly common for elders to delegate this to unbiblical, 'professional', women counsellors). Thank God for this caring ministry where it appears at least. Even so, very few leaders are really centred upon training their people to be ministers. Every single person needs to be equipped to minister to God in his or her field and gifting; every single one. Such is the onerous task of leaders. But very few leaders today understand this; which is why the Biblical means of training people are everywhere abandoned.

The means of equipping are based upon teaching and explaining the word of God to individuals. This can never be accomplished by a formal sermon on Sunday (which is not a Biblical method for training at all but originates from Greek rhetoric). The first task for leaders is to catechise young believers. This means taking them one by one in their own homes and teaching them the basic steps of doctrine in an informal manner, answering all their questions and setting them homework. Today hardly any leader does this and it explains why the church is filled with people who know nothing about Biblical doctrine. Further equipping is hopeless unless this is done first.

Then leaders must focus upon the truth in their training and not how to do things. Churches today are filled with manuals and seminars about how to do this or that, none of which are effective (if they were the church would not be in its current paralysis). It is the truth which makes us free and it is Biblical doctrine which makes men strong in the faith. The sheep need doctrinal development, and this also is not done today. God's people must become theologians, every single one; this is not academic or dusty but training people to know God and his attributes. Only people who know God will do exploits.¹

The modern church leader (with some exceptions here and there) does not concentrate upon equipping the saints but on establishing his personal authority and building a bigger empire for himself. All ecumenical initiatives, for example, are boosts to a leader's authority and reputation. Many leaders put more effort into their peer relationships with other leaders than they do for their own people. This is said to be good for the church and the ecumenical meetings beneficial, but nothing is further from the truth. Ecumenical liaisons with compromised churches and corrupted leaders are down right dangerous. This only does harm to the flock.

¹ Dan 11:32, 'the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits'.

Moreover, most leaders are really managers who are struggling to keep the work going in a certain direction. Very often numerical growth is the prime motivation for their work; so the flock is left without equipping and the meetings are dumbed-down to attract people from the world. In 'seeker-sensitive' churches huge efforts are put into this which actually damages the flock.²

The prime function of leaders is not to control, manage or even to keep the work going; but to identify, nurture and release the gifts of others. This is so simple and obvious in the NT and yet so few church leaders understand that this is their main task.

Leadership is service

Since the objective for the leader is the equipping of the saints, it is clear that the ministry of the leader is based upon service. The ministry of leaders is a delegated ministry from Christ and should follow the example of Christ. The Lord himself came to serve; it was as a servant that he conducted his ministry on earth; church leaders should be not different. The Lord made this point forcibly when he washed the disciple's feet and commanded them to do likewise.

But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.' Matt 20:25-28

Through love serve one another. Gal 5:13

Contrary to the example of the Lord, most church leaders copy the method of the world and run churches like company managers; or worse, in some cases, like princes. Hierarchical leadership structures mean that the people usually do not even get access to the real leaders very easily. I have known people try and try again to talk to chief Charismatic leaders only to be constantly rebuffed; even letters are not replied to. Some Reformed institutional churches are little better.

Most church leaders are not fundamentally based upon serving the flock but on establishing their own authority. This is done by various means; such as:

- Putting leadership buffers between them and the people (as just explained).
- Discouraging questioning of policy.
- Making demands of the people that oppress them.
- Using authoritarian titles for their job (e.g. 'apostle').
- Using sermons to create fear of disagreeing with leadership strategies.
- Creating a system whereby the leader's decisions are seen as God's will which must not be countermanded.
- Threatening outspoken questioners.

Many of these features are marks of a cult and many modern churches are completely cultic in their operation.

² The pioneer church at Willow Creek proved this when it surveyed decades of 'seeker-sensitive' practices. The church had ignored and neglected both young and mature Christians, being focused upon the world and entertainment as an evangelistic lure. Over time, many mature families left as a result. [See later.]

Leadership is fatherhood

Because the church is a family and not an organisation, leadership is fatherly and not managerial or monarchical. The church is not a corporation nor a nation ruled by a prince, but is the household of God (see later). This means that the dynamics of discipline and government are nothing like secular, worldly methods.

Leaders do govern and there are words in the NT that imply this (sometimes translated as 'rule'); but it would be wrong to surmise from such words that church government is either managerial or monarchical. The rule of an elder is like the rule of a father in the home; it is not despotic or authoritarian, but gentle, nurturing, loving and cherishing. Paul says, 'we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children' (1 Thess 2:7).

When the NT says that the people should obey their leaders and submit to them, the words used mean: 'to be persuaded after discussion' (Heb 13:17). When it says that leaders are first (*proistemi* trans. 'rule' in 1 Thess 5:17) it means to give aid or care about; or when it says that leaders rule it means acting as a guardian (1 Tim 5:17). Thus there are no texts which demand that leaders can act in a domineering way, but there are verses which condemn this attitude (1 Pt 5:3).

All leaders must be approachable, available, amenable, sociable, loving, restrained, and all these qualities require that the numbers leaders care for are small and local. The concept of a pastor living a long distance from his flock is nonsense; Jewish shepherds slept in the sheepfold with the flock making their own bodies the gate.

Leaders in the church act as fathers as representatives of our heavenly Father who cares for us as his children. Woe betides any elder that usurps this role with dominating ideas.

We exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children. 1 Thess 2:11

As my beloved children I warn *you*. 1 Cor 4:14

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 1 Cor 4:15-16

As a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel. Phil 2:22

Conversely, most modern church leaders fail to see that they are fathers and adopt various types of authoritarian roles. At the worst end of the scale we have the cultic and authoritarian rulers of Charismatic churches where men are treated as God and their words as the voice of God; some people live in genuine fear of offending such men. Lower down we have a variety of despotic types where men rule the church in various degrees of authoritarianism. Sometimes this is benign and they are genuinely caring people, but still they rule the church and dominate its strategy; at other times it is not benign and the domineering style is obvious.

Leaders are not imported as professionals

Paul's practice was to plant a church in a new region or town and then continue on his missionary journey. On his return to newly planted churches some months later he would appoint elders. These men showed themselves to be qualified by their emergence, in that interval, in teaching the saints. Occasionally, Paul had a longer delay when he could not personally get back to a place, so he sent a delegate to do it for him (as in Crete, Titus 1:5). Thus the apostles 'appointed elders in every church', (Acts 14:23).

Church leaders always arose from within the congregation and were not despatched from somewhere else. They were men who knew the local circumstances and the people. Apostolic delegates may have been sent to bring additional teaching from time to time, but the governing of the church was by the local elders. Paul did not overstep his authority and respected the local elders, no matter how immature.

This leads to a different point, Biblical apostles had no authority over any churches, let alone a multitude of churches in different nations.

On the contrary, it is current practice to get leaders from distant places; in fact it is very rare to find that a church leader has grown from the locality. Sometimes there are elders in a modern church who are locals, but it is rare that these actually run the church. Usually someone is imported, often from a seminary or evangelistic (mission) background.

Leadership is by apprenticeship not academic training

The method of Jesus in training disciples was apprenticeship, as was the method of Paul. This is an investment of life and character into equipping men to lead. Consequently, men considered unsuitable by the world (such as Peter) could be totally transformed by hearing, seeing and being involved in what the master did.

When the church was being established by the apostles there was no thought given to setting up seminaries to qualify men for leadership. Leadership appointment was on the basis of seeing potential gifting and then nurturing that gift by personal, one-to-one training with a teacher. Thus Paul taught Timothy and Titus.

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim 2:2

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 1 Tim 4:6

The overwhelming foundation of gaining understanding to be a teacher is the ministry of the Holy Spirit leading and guiding a person into the truth (Jn 16:13). This is far more important than any level of mere academic tuition.

Opposed to this is the modern method of taking a number of young men (and women) and teaching them in classes away from the church and real life. After two or three years a person is given a certificate and then seeks employment (that is what it really is) in a church. A church selects a person after they heard him preach once or twice. This system is useless.

Firstly, it is impossible to know a person simply by hearing him preach. It is easy for a good speaker to fool people by this method. The character of the potential leader is as important as his ability to teach (not preach, that is a different matter) and a church cannot get this information by one or two meetings. I have known churches take on a minister based on his preaching a 'good' sermon only to find out in time that he was a very poor leader; and in some cases a poor Christian.

Secondly, this method emphasises head knowledge over spiritual knowledge, and academic learning over being taught by the Spirit in experience. It is the opposite of what Jesus did.

Thirdly, all seminaries tend to make students blind followers of their particular system, and virtually all modern seminaries are riddled with errors; some serious. The sources of

many modern heresies are seminary professors.³ Graduation from even a Reformed seminary is no longer a guarantee of orthodoxy; this corrupted teaching is then dissipated through the church.

Only men can lead

God created a man, Adam, to be the steward of the earth and it was only later that God created a woman to be his helpmeet. Adam was created from dust but Eve from Adam. Paul mentions this order of creation as part of his case to demonstrate that, in the church, women cannot lead. He then goes on to explain that Eve was deceived and also uses this as part of his case. It is noteworthy that in my experience (and this is borne out in history) women fall into deception much more easily than men do.

For these reasons it is clear that women cannot teach or hold positions of authority over men. To make the position crystal clear, Paul says so in bold terms, 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man'.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ... A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife. 1 Tim 2:11-14, 3:2

Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you. Gen 3:16

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 1 Cor 14:34, 35

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach. Rev 2:20

Only by the most wilful avoidance of God's word could a case for women's leadership be developed. But this is exactly what many modern churches, of all stripes, have done. Today we find that it is not only liberal Anglicans that have women leaders, but also radical Charismatics, with women apostles and prophets, and also US Presbyterians, Methodists and many Independents. Even some churches that do not advocate women elders have women counsellors on staff who are doing a job proper to elders. Worse still many of these female counsellors are trained psychologists ignorant of Biblical doctrine. They then apply the lies of a fraud like Freud or the notions of an occultist like Jung to wounded believers instead of the truth of God.

Apostles are not archbishops

Charismatic churches have frequently centred upon the need for one man to lead multiple churches under one banner. This is claimed to be a return to early church practice but this is false. The NT church had no other leaders except a team of equal elders. Ministry from apostles was received and welcomed, especially if the apostle had formed that church. However, the apostle had no formal authority in the church but only in his office as a church planter. Clearly the advice of a godly apostle was considered persuasive, but it did not come as official direction; that could only arise from the elders.

The modern practice of Charismatic apostleship is nothing like NT apostleship but resembles the Episcopalian ministry of an archbishop; a senior leader having authority over many churches within a denomination. The ministry of a Biblical apostle is merely

³ For example NT Wright, regarding the 'New Perspective on Paul', or Norman Shepherd on 'Federal Vision'.

church building. Once the church had been established and elders appointed then the work of the apostle was done. His ministry in his home church was whatever it was before he left to plant churches – an elder or evangelist. Though he may have much respect, the apostle had no authority as an apostle in his home church.

The ministry of the church apostle, (as exemplified by Andronicus, Junia,⁴ and Epaphroditus⁵) is not to be confused with the temporary and special ministry of the 12 apostles sent by Christ. Ordinary apostles were sent by the church but the 12 were specially commissioned by Christ personally and had superior authority to do miracles to authenticate their heavenly ministry (Heb 2:3-4). As a foundation work, the ministry of the 12 passed when they died but the work of church planters sent by the churches continues and has no extraordinary supernatural gifts. Apostles are missionaries.

Worship leaders do not exist

Modern Charismatic and semi-Charismatic meetings require worship leaders due to their content and the size of the meeting. This is platform-led by a single person (often a woman, which is unbiblical) leading a worship band and often the leading is musically not spiritually led.

Clearly this can only occur in large churches (more than 20) meeting in a building of sufficient size. This is contrary to Biblical teaching that churches are small and meet in homes. There is no need for a worship leader in a small group meeting in a lounge.

The basis of the leading is to induce passivity (get people 'lost in God') as a result of developing an atmosphere through musical steps and repetitive singing of banal choruses. This begins with rousing choruses of praise but develops into more reflective, quieter choruses of worship which induce passivity and the expression of Charismatic novelties (such as singing in the Spirit). This whole process is contrary to Scripture which demands that we exercise self-control at all times and teaches us that worship is rationally based not founded upon an empty mind.

Fleshly emotionalism, the basis of modern worship, is also condemned as an expression of the old nature. Thus modern worship leaders are really presiding over a worldly entertainment not a Biblical practice.

Finally, only elders can lead the church in any capacity; therefore people who are not elders cannot be worship leaders (if there were such an animal).

Worship leaders are to be condemned since:

- They are unbiblical; there is no mention of one anywhere in the NT.
- The reliance upon music is also unbiblical; there is no mention of musical instruments in connection with the NT church either (see that section).
- They require an unbiblical meeting of a certain size in a big building – but NT churches meet as small numbers in homes.
- They preside over a process of engendering passivity in the congregation, which is anathema.
- They provoke fleshly emotionalism and preside over entertainment.
- Leading the people in church is the sole job of elders.

⁴ 'Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.' Rm 16:17

⁵ 'I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger ['apostolos].' Phil 2:25

Deliverance ministries do not exist

The common ministry of delivering a person from evil spirits, found in most Charismatic churches, has no Biblical support whatsoever. There is not one verse of apostolic testimony to support the office of a deliverance minister or a deliverance ministry.

Neither is there any teaching on the need of Christians to be exorcised of demons. The expulsion of demons in the NT is from the bodies of unbelievers who had been confronted by the divine presence. Christians are those who have been, '**delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love**' (Col 1:13). If we are set free from the kingdom of darkness, how can the hordes of darkness live within our spirit?

The way the Christian deals with problems and sin is by putting off the old nature, by confession of sin, by prayer, by repentance and by resisting temptation in the first place. Deliverance ministers ignore all these and expel demons to rid a person of their temptations and besetting sins. Often this cements a person in their habitual weakness rather than curing it because it avoids emphasising the responsibility of the person to deal with their own sins properly. For this reason many patients end up being repeatedly delivered of demon after demon.

Some deliverance ministers also employ extreme measures that are utterly unbiblical. Some use sacramental items to help cleanse an area of sin (such as communion wine [what is that!] poured into the groin to expel demons of lust). Others punch and even fight with their patients, seeing only a demon not a person. There are cases where a minister's actions have led to the death of a patient as a result.

Deliverance ministry is utterly unbiblical.

Qualifications and characteristics of leaders

The essential requirement for a church leader is that he must be a broken man. Only broken men have learned to be utterly dependent upon God's provision, in all things, and this dependence is necessary to avoid the chief sin of man, which is pride. Meekness is the opposite of pride and leaders must be meek; that is controlled and broken. Moses had to learn meekness through 80 years of brokenness before he could lead God's people for 40 years effectively.

Leadership, in any situation, brings the temptation of pride and this is why it must be avoided at all costs in churches. Only truly broken men have had their pride smashed. Only broken men care nothing about themselves, have no care even when they are slandered by friends, and thus they rely upon God's grace all the time. Every prayer, every bit of teaching, every bit of counselling causes them to seek God's grace rather than trust in their own abilities.

Consequently, like Martin Luther, they can say that their sufferings are more important to them than all their achievements. It is their sufferings, trials, tribulations, afflictions and persecutions which lead to God breaking all the human strengths in them so that they lean upon God and not man.

This is the essential requirement of church leaders.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. Prov 3:5

Are they ministers of Christ? -- I speak as a fool -- I *am* more: in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was

shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. 2 Cor 11:23-30

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:7-10

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God. 2 Cor 3:5

Opposed to this is the way that modern leaders are perceived. They are seen to be men of power, of authority, of persuasive preaching. They are men with an impressive presence. In Charismatic circles they are men who call down the Holy Spirit and throw him round the room (may God forgive them this blasphemy). They act haughtily, enthusiastically and shout a lot. In some cases they are even violent towards people in pursuance of ridding them of demons (God have mercy). They claim to have authority over sickness and even death and shout at people, pushing them over to the ground, to effect their power.

None of this is reminiscent of Paul's attitude who said that his appearance in preaching was weak and his ability in public speaking was poor (2 Cor 10:10, 11:6). He reminded the Corinthians that, 'I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom,' (1 Cor 2:3-4).

Modern preachers boast about their achievements, how many have been supposedly healed, the thousands they have reached, and so forth;⁶ yet Paul said, 'of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities,' (2 Cor 12:5). Paul's badge of honour was his sufferings for Christ, not his achievements; this is brokenness.

Leaders are judged more severely

The attitude of most Christians to leaders today is to continually forgive, or more often ignore altogether, the failings of leaders. It's almost as if their support structure would collapse if they dared to speak out against a leader. In fact, some leaders prey upon this reticence by demanding that no one can, 'touch God's anointed'. The result is that leaders bring in erroneous doctrine and no one complains. Leaders bring in occult practices and no one admonishes them. Leaders commit the church to ecumenical corruption and no one says anything. Worst of all, leaders bring false prophecy after false prophecy and they still remain in office (in Moses' day they would have been killed). Let's examine this.

The application of 'touching anointed ones' to allowing leaders a free rein is abusing the Scriptures.

⁶ When did you hear of a Biblical apostle boasting to have saved thousands of people in a certain country and then use that credit to ask for money to boost his ministry elsewhere? Yet this is a common modern practice.

He permitted no man to do them wrong; Yes, He rebuked kings for their sakes, *Saying*, "Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm." 1 Chron 16:21-22; Ps 105:14-15

And David said to Abishai, 'Do not destroy him [Saul]; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?' 1 Sam 26:9

The first instance refers to the divine protection of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in their wanderings (Ps 105:9-10). The patriarchs were prophets, having the word of God as no other man.⁷ This is a reference to the protection of God when the elect were in very small numbers and had not settled. It is the divine protection of the elect. The modern application of this refers to the sovereign deliverance of the Lord's people from evil; the Lord's anointed today is every believer. Spurgeon says,

"Do *my prophets* no harm." All through the many years in which the three great fathers dwelt in Canaan no man was able to injure them; they were not able to defend themselves by force of arms, but the eternal God was their refuge. Even so at this present time the remnant according to the election of grace cannot be destroyed, nay, nor so much as touched, without the divine consent. Against the church of Christ the gates of hell cannot prevail.⁸

The second example is the specific reference to the capital punishment of an apostate king in Israel. This lies in God's hands and not man's. Thus David would not kill Saul when he had the opportunity but waited for him to kill himself (with some assistance). This is a specific application that has no relevance to modern times in the church. But even anointed kings in Israel could be condemned by the prophets for apostasy or oppression of the people.

So, the phrase, 'touch not mine anointed' (to use the AV translation) does not mean that believers cannot contend against false church leaders or admonish good but mistaken church leaders. In any case we have specific examples and commands in the NT to do exactly that.⁹

The second issue is that leaders are to be judged more severely than other believers.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. Jm 3:1

'Judgment' refers to a judicial judgment or condemnation of wrong. This pre-eminently refers to the judgment of God on the Day of Judgment when all man's works will be taken into account, including how leaders have taught the flock. But if God judges leaders in this way, then so must the church, which is to act as God in discernment. If we have the mind of Christ then we must judge with the mind of Christ.

Thus elders who sin must be publicly rebuked. This judgment does not apply to the congregation. The sins of a member of the congregation should be confessed as widely as the sin. Thus private sins are confessed to God alone. However, for elders, their sins must be confessed in public so that all may fear.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. 1 Tim 5:19-20

⁷ Abraham is described as a prophet in Genesis 20:7 and what David has in mind is probably Abraham's dealings with Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen 20:2+), the Pharaoh of Egypt (Gen 12:17-20) and the battle of the four kings (Gen 14:8+). It could also refer to a similar situation in Gen 26:11, where Abimelech says of Isaac, 'He that touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.'

⁸ CH Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (On Ps 105:15)

⁹ E.g. Paul confronting Peter in public Gal 2:11-21. The fact of erroneous teachers and the need to act: Acts 17:10-11; 1 John 4:1; 2 Pt 2:1-2; 2 Cor 11:13; 2 Tim 3:13-15.

The NT is very clear on the need to judge false doctrine, as we have shown. Now false doctrine comes from false teachers and so it is obvious that teachers must be assessed and admonished when in error. Unrepentant false teachers must be disciplined and possibly removed. The reason the modern church is in such a terrible mess is that no one has been examining what is being taught and admonishing erroneous leaders.

For instance, I know a man who is held in international esteem. He leads a large number of people and, indeed, churches. He is sought after for conferences and other engagements. Yet this man has repeatedly brought false doctrine into his churches. He has introduced a multitude of erroneous practices, some of which are mystical and occultic. He has been directly responsible for some terrible abuses of many individuals; some of his victims have been dramatically damaged for life. He has seen hundreds of mature, good people leave his church over many decades and cares nothing at all since more gullible students flock in each year. There have been times when he gave false specific prophecy after false specific prophecy and no one did a thing, contrary to God's word.¹⁰ In nearly forty years very few people dared to confront him to his face and those that did were treated badly and were forced to leave, losing everything they had worked for. But the congregation as a whole just ignored his multitude of mistakes and false teaching; neither did the eldership have the guts to confront his errors. It is no wonder that this church denomination is riddled with errors of teaching, bad practice and weak believers with a poor testimony.

Church meetings

The Lord's Supper is central

Contrary to popular belief, the sermon is not the focus of the gathered church; breaking of bread is.¹¹ Indeed, celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently is a divine command (Matt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:17-19). The reason is that the focus of the gathered church on Sunday should be Christ and him crucified.

It is clear apostolic teaching and practise that breaking bread is the reason for churches to assemble. Why do we gather on Sunday? Primarily to share the Lord's Supper and remember the Lord's sacrifice for us.

Apostolic practice was to initially break bread often, sometimes daily, in each other's homes (Acts 2:42,46) and later to break bread as a corporate body on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7); gradually the custom centred on the weekly event '**when you meet together**' (1 Cor 11:18, 20).

This ordinance fits easily within a community framework in a home; just like its precursor, the Passover meal, it was a family ritual. Indeed the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper as part of a larger church meal called *the agape feast* where the rich brought food to share with the poor. The context is firmly set within community life, and encourages community as a family together (Acts 2:42). In formal, organised, institutional churches it is far more difficult to maintain such intimacy and the memorial of the Lord's death became a stylised ritual that was a shadow of the original. In modern large churches it is yet harder, so that many celebrate it rarely, or ignore it altogether.

The Supper is a means of realising the presence of Jesus and is not just a memorial (1 Cor 10:16; Lk 24:30-31; Acts 10:41; Jn 21:9-14). Indeed, failure to reverence it leads to

¹⁰ Deut 13:1-5, 18:20-22.

¹¹ 1 Cor 11:18, 20; Acts 2:42.

judgment (1 Cor 11:28-32), so powerful and important is this divine institution. Why would churches not make the most of this by weekly practise? We disobey God by neglecting it.

On the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread. Acts 20:7

When you come together as a church, ... to eat the Lord's Supper. 1 Cor 11:18-20 [The apostle, in these verses, criticises the Corinthians' failure to do this.]

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

Contrary to the church's focus upon Christ and his atonement, as featured in the Supper, the modern church concentrates upon a man – the minister who preaches a sermon. This is the very opposite of what the church should be doing.

Open fellowship

Biblical church meetings are informal, open, like a family and based upon the principles of fellowship. This is where everyone can participate and share their gift in Christ. The whole point of the church meeting together is so that it meets as a body. It is where everyone who has the Spirit can share what they have of Christ.

In the marks of the church listed in Acts 2:42 most of the marks involve the whole body (fellowship, breaking bread, praying); and even teaching doctrine is not the sole province of leaders.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given ... 1 Cor 12:4-7

The modern church squashes the gifts residing in the congregation. A false line of division has been established to separate the official clergy from the unofficial laity, and only the clergy can participate. Even worse, in many churches, only one man every says anything meaningful. Worse than that the leaders that do all the ministry are placed on a platform above the congregation, emphasising the low estate of the membership compared to leaders.

The modern practice is the exact opposite of Biblical practice.

Mutual edification

Why do we gather together? The apostolic answer is not 'to worship' but rather to edify one another. Since we are supposed to be constant worshippers, that we will worship is taken for granted. The function of the church is to be a place of edification, and this building up is done by all the members as God leads by his Spirit.

This is why the phrase, 'one another' appears so often in the NT to emphasise mutual, interdependent ministry. Growth in the Christian life is by God's grace, but God has purposed that this grace is usually mediated through *koinonia*, so that we are dependent upon each other (Eph 4:29). As we encourage one another we all partake more of God's

grace. This is why apostolic commands are frequently found in the form of the 'one another' phrase

Meetings are to be places where all share so that every gift of Christ is manifest and all benefit. The point of gathering is that mutual edification takes place. Meetings that are dominated and controlled by one man are not Biblical church meetings at all but represent the opposite of Biblical assembling.

Edify means 'to build up', like the building up a house (from which the word derives), and thus involves the concepts of construction, laying a foundation, strengthening, encouragement, promoting growth, development. We teach and encourage one another bit by bit, just as bricks are laid one upon another very slowly until a house is formed.

The reason for the multiple command to edify one another is that God has gifted every member of the body of Christ in a certain way¹² and by sharing these gifts of grace we build each other up. Some may have many gifts, some may have more powerful gifts, but all have something of Christ that only they can express. The body needs to receive and benefit from these gifts in order to grow.

Indeed, the only way people (and the church) grow is when all the body works together interdependently: '... speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love' (Eph 4:15-16). Without the expression of these gifts, there is no growth.

The clearest picture of a NT meeting is 1 Corinthians 14 and in this chapter alone the word 'edify' (and its cognates) is mentioned 7 times. Here Paul exhorts believers to share their gifts for the good of all, that everyone may be exhorted, encouraged, edified and comforted (1 Cor 14:3).¹³ Christian meetings are not about grandstanding performances, showy expressions or fleshly exhibitions of talent; neither are they preaching centres - no matter how good the preacher is. Christian meetings are about ordinary folk sharing what they have of Christ with a mind to do each other good. Edification is *koinonia* in action.

A crucial aspect of *koinonia* is that the Holy Spirit sovereignly gives gifts to the church to ensure spiritual development (read 1 Cor 12 carefully). The Spirit gifts individuals in the body using ordinary folk to edify others in the assembly and serve the community: **But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given ... through the Spirit ...** (1 Cor 12:7-8). The expression of the Spirit is not solely given to one man, but to all.

Therefore let us pursue the things which *make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Rm 14:19

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Cor 14:26

Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification. Rm 15:2

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Eph 4:29

¹² Eph 3:7, 4:7; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Pt 4:10, 'As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.'

¹³ The arbitrary exegesis of this passage to teach the opposite, that Paul is condemning the Corinthians for allowing body ministry, is distorted, strange and a shocking attempt to clutch at straws. See my paper, *1 Cor 14:26, A Rebuttal of a Novel Exegesis*.

Let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel. 1 Cor 14:12

Love edifies. 1 Cor 8:1

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Rm 14:19

Comfort each other and edify one another. 1 Thess 5:11

Family meetings

The church is God's family, the household of God. It is where the brethren meet to worship their heavenly Father. It is where even leaders are fathers and nursing mothers. (1 Thess 2:11; 1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:7) It is a family and the basis of it is brotherly love (1 Pt 3:8; 1 Tim 5:1-2). As such it is informal and interdependent, like a human family.

Though other idioms are sometimes used for the church¹⁴ these are to emphasise certain spiritual facets.¹⁵ Underneath all these symbolic pictures, the reality of the church is that it is actually placed in Christ, and Christ is God's Son. So God is a Father to every believer and thus the church is truly (not symbolically) God's family.

You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. Eph 2:19

The household of faith. Gal 6:10

[‘Household’ means ‘belonging to a family, kin’.]

Conversely, modern churches are usually organisations, or at best large social clubs. The larger the church, the more it becomes an organisation. The largest Charismatic churches are worse still being business enterprises with turnovers in the millions. They are worse than organisations; they are commercial empires. Yet even smaller, rural churches are often established like an organisation, being formal in liturgy and resembling a business meeting with a chairman leading and doing all the talking with a docile, subservient congregation, doing nothing but standing and sitting when required. Apart from a quick chat when leaving through the door, one's only fellowship is with the back of another person's head.

While many people feel committed to this because of the social background to a church, very often this social life has very little to do with real Christian fellowship; there is rarely edification, admonishment, confrontation, exhortation and commitment. Their life revolves around mid-week meetings of one sort or another but even here there is little participation and most of these meetings are unbiblical.

The modern church is the opposite of being in an informal family atmosphere, but is rigid, organised, official, formal and utilitarian.

The formal sermon is not the main designated way of teaching the flock

Teaching is absolutely crucial to church life; indeed church is mostly about learning in one form or another. But Biblical church teaching is not restricted to a formal sermon spoken by one man every week without interruption; this is the very opposite of genuine ministry.

¹⁴ Such as: temple, army, people, nation, flock, vine etc.

¹⁵ For instance: Temple - where God's worship is focused on Earth; Holy Nation - who God's people are rather than others; Army - the focus of heavenly warfare etc.

The early churches were places of body ministry, everyone ministering to each other in a variety of ways. There was constant encouragement. Overseeing all this were elders who were focused on people actually learning and growing.

It may be that solid doctrinal instruction is required, as the elders see fit, and Bible studies are arranged mid-week to facilitate extended study, along with questions, discussion and debate. However, in the main Sunday meeting what is required is to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit and the elders gather the teaching together from the flow of what is shared. Thus teaching on Sunday is responsive to what the people are saying and the Spirit is directing. This gives people the opportunity to ask questions and for discussions of a topic to be undertaken.

Such a method is far superior to a formal sermon, which everyone accepts is a poor method of communication. As little as 2-4% of sermons are retained, even by studious people. Not only do they fail to instruct properly, but they are dominated by one man to the exclusion of everyone else – an unbiblical practice. The church is not a preaching centre. The idea of a man dominating a meeting by a sermon, in an entertaining way, was Greek, not Biblical, at the time NT writing. Popular entertainment was to see a respected orator giving a homily or displaying rhetoric skills.

Sermons are effective means of passing simple ideas on to crowds of people (such as the Sermon on the Mount); but the Lord saved detailed instruction to informal times with his disciples where they could ask him questions. Paul did the same. His sermons are evangelistic outreaches to the public; while in churches Paul shared more in discussion in homes (Acts 20:11, 20, 31).

Preaching a sermon is shown to be for evangelistic purposes in the NT but teaching that involves questions and discussion is for the church. Sadly translations have failed to identify this and frequently the word 'preach' is used when the Greek word means something else. A case in point is Acts 20:7; the AV uses the word 'preach' here when the Greek word is *dialegomai*, meaning a discussion. Paul did not 'preach' a formal sermon in Troas; he taught and encouraged the disciples in a way that included interruptions, questions, and discussion. [Actually, in the early church period even formal sermons in public were frequently interrupted with questions and heckling, forcing interaction.]

The English word 'preach' is used to translate about 30 different Greek words regarding the proclamation of God's word. Those that specifically mean proclamation or preaching are describing the evangelisation of outsiders. When Paul spoke to churches and brethren, words such as argument, conversation and persuasion are used which suggest interaction and dialogue.

Sermons are not common in the OT and usually appear at times of crisis; but even then they sometimes included active participation (Isa 5:3ff; Amos 3:3-8). In any case, we have little information about the presentation, length and style of apostolic preaching (speeches are often edited in the text).

Nothing in the writing of the sub-apostolic church fathers suggest that a regular sermon was the usual means of teaching in church meetings. Gradually, as Christian leaders emerged who were earlier trained in rhetoric, sermons began to appear regularly. Even when sermons were well established by the 3rd century, they still contained interruptions, interactivity and feedback. The sermon developed as the normal means of teaching at the

same time as other worldly influences began to dominate the church and mutual ministries diminished.¹⁶

Throughout history, great preachers have lamented that the sermonic form produced poor effects in believers. Church fathers¹⁷ and more modern theologians¹⁸ have stated the method is ineffective.

I am not suggesting that sermons be abandoned, but that they should not dominate the Sunday meeting of the gathered community; instead solid teaching should have more time in another meeting. The teacher will use whatever means God inspires. This may include sermons, but also personal example of character, private visitation and tutoring, group discussions with questions and answers and meetings given over entirely to Bible study. Sermons are primarily for the proclamation of the Gospel to outsiders.

The early church did not use musical instruments

Search as long as you like, you will find no reference to musical instruments in connection with the church in the New Testament. The church followed the Jewish synagogue in this. Instruments only began to be used in marginalised churches after about 200 years as other pagan influences began to be absorbed and this development was condemned by church leaders. Instrumental music was formally introduced into Roman church services by Pope Vitelian in 671 AD but musical instruments were only in widespread use after 1200. Even then musical instruments were condemned by the Reformers (Luther called them '*ensigns of Baal*') and most Reformed churches had none until the Victorian Age. Spurgeon refused them in the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Worship is a reverential attitude of the heart and a submission of life to God (Rm 12:1-2) and is not directly linked to music. The Charismatic identification of music with worship is deleterious and tends towards mysticism. In Patriarchal times music was not necessary for true worship (Heb 11:21). Even under the Mosaic Law worship could be expressed in awful circumstances without music (2 Sam 12:20). Instrumental music is not mentioned in connection with saints in the NT at all; indeed, music is only mentioned as a feature in connection with the judgment of Babylon (Rev 18:22).¹⁹

The use of musical instruments in the temple services is part of the old covenant, which has now been cancelled. We have no more right to introduce bands or choirs into church services than to kill bulls and goats or wear vestments. As the sacrifices are symbolic of an NT truth, so are instruments – they speak figuratively of the harmony of Christian praise from the lips (Heb 13:15).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Col 3:16

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Eph 5:19

¹⁶ The down grade included: the introduction of instrumental music and choirs; the problem of various heresies; the influx of Gnosticism and mystical practices; the decline of true spiritual gifts; the development of institutional leadership; domination by Rome; the establishment of church buildings - and then icons, altars, and decorations; and worldly acceptance by the Roman emperor causing an influx of superficial trendy 'believers'.

¹⁷ E.g. Clement of Alexandria; see B J Kidd, *Hist. of the church to AD461*, 1922, I, 405.

¹⁸ E.g. RL Dabney.

¹⁹ 'Harps' in revelation are symbolic and indicative of harmonious Christian praise (Rev 14:2, 15:2). There are no material harps in heaven. Interestingly, only the voice/song is recorded as being heard.

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. Heb 13:15

The modern church is fixated on musical instruments. Even small conservative churches have at least an organ (which is quite loud in itself) but Charismatic churches have a full rock band, often with deafening volume. I am told that some Charismatic churches now even use subdued lighting so that, with a band, the appearance is more like a night-club than a church.

All this speaks of the flesh, which is the reason why the early fathers condemned the introduction of music; instruments encourage the flesh, especially drums, and lead to mysticism. Pagan rituals have always been dominated by drums and rhythmic instruments and the modern church has imported all this into its supposed worship. Even old covenant worship in the temple never incorporated drums; the word is not found in Scripture.

Worship

We have seen that worship is often identified in connection with music; especially in Charismatic settings. Indeed, many people play 'worship' music albums while they are doing chores and consider that this is worshipping. What is happening here is that worship becomes associated with a certain type of music-led, emotional feeling; and this is dangerous.

Christian worship is not a feeling; it is an act of the will based on rational facts. Christian worship is when one submits to God in an act of adoration and submission to his majesty and sovereignty. Such submission first requires seeing God's sovereign, majestic glory compared to my own sinfulness. Thus the chief NT word for 'worship' (*proskuneo*) means, 'to bow the knee before', 'to kiss the hand', 'prostration', 'to make obeisance', 'to do homage to a superior'. The emphasis is submission and nothing to do with how one feels.

Worship is also spiritual; it has nothing to do with being in a special place, a special building, in a special atmosphere or in a certain emotion. It is an act of my spirit, not my flesh.

Worship is also to be performed in truth. This means that our worship must be according to Biblical doctrine and not in any way that we see fit. If our worship is not true to God's word, then it is false fire from a demonic source. The chief problem with failing this test is that worship becomes idolatrous, focused on something other than God. Much modern worship is idolatrous and unbiblical.

Worship is to be distinguished from praise. There are various NT words for praise but the fundamental meaning behind them is to show commendation of something, 'approbation', 'approval'; whether spoken or sung. Thus men can be praised for doing something good (1 Cor 4:5, 11:2; 2 Cor 8:18) but men are never worshipped. Most Christian songs are praises to God; speaking of how great he is and how wonderful his works are.

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. Ps 95:6

God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. Jn 4:24

Falling down on *his* face, he will worship God. 1 Cor 14:25

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Phil 3:3

In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you. Heb 2:12

Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of *our* lips, giving thanks to His name. Heb 13:15

Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great! Rev 19:5

So, worship is not a feeling but an act of submission; a statement of how small I am and how great and superior God is. It is prostration to majesty. Pagan worship, however, is very different. The worship of heathen religions and cults is very reliant upon emotionalism. It may involve a certain amount of fear of superior spirit beings and submission to them, but it chiefly relies upon the generation of certain feelings. This often involves seeking to manipulate higher powers to ones' will, especially in occult ceremonies using magic.

To generate these feelings pagans, and especially occult groups, utilise a variety of means to stimulate certain emotions. These can involve music, drugs, rigorous disciplines (e.g. whirling around), dancing, chanting mantras or staring at a mandala.²⁰ The most common rituals involve music and dancing.

The purpose of these means is to lose oneself; to leave the drudgery of ordinary life, and become transfixed on a higher life. The preliminary to full abandonment is a growing feeling of ecstasy as the worship ritual takes hold. This is a pleasant feeling, which many Christian worshippers strive for. This ecstatic feeling is the result of a growing passivity, which is a disconnection of the rational mind from the body. The objective of pagan ritual is to become so passive that normal mental and rational thought processes stop and the person enters an altered state of consciousness, or a trance, or an hypnotic state. This is the basis of heathen mysticism where it is believed that a person in this state connects with the god inside, having lost the restricting bonds of normal human existence.²¹

This trance state is when mind over matter experiences can occur; a person in this state can be oblivious to pain and walk over hot coals for instance. Such a person is extremely suggestible and will perform the commands of a superior. This is what happens in hypnotic shows on TV and in theatres.

Modern Charismatic worship relies heavily upon this same process. It uses repetitive music and chanting songs repeatedly to induce ecstatic feelings (becoming 'lost in God') which then lead to passivity and suggestibility. At first the music generates excitement and activity, which may inspire dancing or jumping, and then it blends into more introspective, ambient, droning music which leads into passivity. In this irrational state people can easily be led into doing foolish things, such as falling backwards, dancing, making animal noises, crying, laughing, jumping up and down etc. The reliance of Charismatics upon seeking an emotional experience leads directly to mystical occult practices.

Christians in an altered state of consciousness can be induced to believe they have been cured and do experience analgesic effects of the trance. Such states affect brain activity, for instance to release endorphin hormones, which make people happy or have an opiate analgesic effect; or adrenaline, which makes people temporarily stronger and braver. Afterwards this all passes away and the incumbent illness is seen to still exist.

²⁰ A circular disc with an optical pattern.

²¹ The mystical process is usually by an ascending process through a series of stripping back exercises or rising up disciplines. These are all aimed at dying to the normal waking life and its hindering activities and awakening the god-life within the soul.

The centre of Charismatic worship is twofold: the presence of an authoritarian leader whose will controls the ambient atmosphere, giving commands, and the performance of a rock band to dominate the emotions. Thus Charismatic worship relies heavily upon a platform led entertainment at best, leading to occult mysticism at worst. This behaviour is close to idolatry. When the erratic and unrighteous behaviour is the result of obeying the command of a leader on a platform then it is direct idolatry; the Christian has become submitted to a mere man.

Thus the centre of Charismatic worship is fleshly feelings to make people feel better resulting from an entertaining performance on stage which whips up emotions. In more radical groups this is pushed into mystical extremes to produce the effects described.²² In times of global religious excitement (not a real revival) all Charismatic churches get pushed into adopting the radical practices. This occurred in the Toronto Experience for instance, where even small local churches had rampant exotic behaviour for a time. All of this is occult in inspiration and has nothing to do with divine worship.

Proliferation of Multiple meetings

For example: children's, women's, men's, Gospel, healing, worship, regional celebration, business, counselling etc. The early church had none of these; it knew only single gatherings for worship, breaking bread and edification, plus additional prayer meetings and Bible study meetings when required. Children fully participated in these. [Acts 2:42; 12:5; 13:2; 20:9; 1 Cor 14.]

Bible weeks

Again there was no such thing in the New Testament. The purpose of Bible Weeks is to offer a vibrant social life in the day as an attraction; vigorous entertaining worship with a professional band in the evening to jolly people up, followed by powerful preaching to push a certain agenda. In the past one agenda was to cement the authority of certain men who called themselves 'apostles. Through the Bible Week the 'apostle' generated support and favour for his ministry based upon the power of the social life and camp meeting, which could never be repeated in the church back home. Churches that camped at the Bible Week later came into the apostle's fold, having been attracted by the ministry and life at the convention.

However, none of this is Biblical. Neither the concept of Bible Weeks nor the practice of one man ruling over many churches has any Biblical warrant. Historically camp meetings (as they were previously known), and especially the Methodist and Holiness revivalist camp meetings in mid-19th century USA, led to multiple doctrinal errors and church problems, plus rampant social evils.²³

Seeker sensitive meetings

This is the dumbed-down, superficial approach to church meetings as practised by the Willow Creek church in Chicago, Illinois, (pastor Bill Hybels) and 'the purpose-driven church' model of Saddle Back church in California (pastor Rick Warren), both much copied

²² Radical Charismatic churches would be those who focus more on mysticism and whose doctrine is more unorthodox. Such would include Word Faith churches, extreme Pentecostals (especially Black African Pentecostals), and radical Charismatics (such as Christian Outreach Centre and the New Apostolic Reformation) and so on.

²³ To name one, fornication became common in the wild excesses of ecstatic behaviour of the sort found in the Toronto Blessing. A local proverb summed it up, '*There were more people begot than born again*'. I have read a security firm report (which patrolled conventions) which stated that the same kind of fornication was prevalent in certain large Charismatic conventions in England.

throughout the world. The purpose is to make the church as much like the world as possible to entice sinners to come in and feel at home.

In such churches the focus is man and not God, so that preaching is superficial and never threatening, never mentioning sin; all topics are 'culturally relevant' and 'needs centred', not based upon Biblical or doctrinal exposition (e.g. 'How to manage your money'; 'How Can I Feel Better About Myself?' or 'How Can I Have a Happier Marriage?'). The atmosphere is informal, perhaps some people are having coffee on the edges of the meeting at tables. The meeting is heavily dominated by entertainment of various sorts: a rock band, superficial worship, light shows, dramas, dancing and so forth.

Such churches initially grew rapidly, and so their methods were copied. However decades later even Bill Hybels had to admit that in many ways it was a failure and Willow Creek is making changes. Such a superficial approach (apart from being unbiblical) fed people with less than milk. In time the more mature people became very dissatisfied and many older families left to find better supply elsewhere. Thus the churches became more and more filled with very immature people seeking a cultural 'hit', and many unbelievers, rather than mature people seeking Biblical fellowship.

None of the fundamentals of the Seeker-Sensitive approach has any Biblicity at all. It requires a big building, a rock band, a Charismatic worship style, a charismatic speaker on cultural relevance, dramas and other unscriptural add-ons. At its very basic level it can be identified as false because the Biblical church is to centre upon the pre-eminence of Christ while these churches focus upon sinful man. Seeker Sensitive churches are where the church has become like the world.

Church practices

Church membership

The apostolic church was a place of complete commitment; all the brethren were utterly committed to each other in reality. Unity arose from this commitment not by any formal admission. The reason for this commitment was the spiritual change that had dramatically altered the people. Since believers had been united in Christ, they were spiritually united to each other and they took this seriously.

In the NT we never read of being members of a church but of being members of one another. Neither does the NT speak of 'joining' a church because we are already united in Christ.²⁴ Rather it says that we should 'keep' (guard, attend to carefully, maintain) the [existing] unity of the Spirit, not establish it (Eph 4:3).

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

Members of one another. Rm 12:5; Eph 4:25

Receive one another. Rm 15:7

²⁴ 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.

The modern practice of segregating believers into an inner and outer core is unloving and unbiblical, especially if only formal members are allowed to break bread. There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that after a period of attendance, Christians should make some kind of commitment, often written, and then 'become' church members having voting rights and able to become officers. This idea separates what God has said is already joined and is offensive to God. The idea that some people ('members') are more special than others ('non-members') or that some people have rights (e.g. voting on decisions) that others don't, is anathema. To segregate believers is deeply offensive to God, who told us to and not to 'prefer one before another' (1 Tim 5: 21). If Christians are received by God when they are converted, they should be received by any church. It is he who fitly framed us together, and the church needs no man or group to authorise his choice.

Sacrificial giving

True giving is an act of worship (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16). Indeed, giving to the poor is lending to God (Prov 19:17). As an act of worship, Christian giving is to be motivated by the heart and not restricted by the ideas of men; the important thing is to hear from God about what you give and whom you give it to. Genuine giving, in the way that God prescribes and to God's chosen recipients, results in thanksgiving to God. The best sort of giving is that which is sacrificial, as Jesus observed:

Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.' Mk 12:42-44

This widow gave sacrificially, even though it amounted to less than an American cent.

In the NT the focus of giving is chiefly upon the poor, needy, afflicted and destitute. It is to be given first to Christians in need and then to the world around us, our neighbour (Gal 6:10; Matt 19:19; Rm 15:2). In certain conditions (not commonly) Christians should give to ministers who are unable to work because of the word of God (1 Cor 9:11). Since this chiefly applies to itinerant ministers, it would be rare to give to elders. Elders, being in a team and leading a small church, rarely need to be full-time.

Giving is absolutely crucial to a genuine Christian testimony. A believer who is not a giver is a loser. The Lord promised that the measure we give is the measure we get. A Christian should be giving in every sense: of his time, of his love, of his care of his money, of his possessions.

Everything in our lives is to be considered as being given to us by God and to be used for his service; this includes our wives and children (1 Sam 1:28). Sometimes, it costs us more to sacrifice our time, perhaps much needed leisure time, in order to help those God puts in our way.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Cor 9:7

For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for *your* liberal sharing with them and all *men*. 2 Cor 9:12-13

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you. Lk 6:38

He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Cor 9:6

Many churches teach that strict tithing, i.e. 10% of their disposable income (some would say gross) to the Lord's work, is obligatory. Usually they mean for this to be given to the church treasurer. There are multiple problems with this.

1. The Lord has never told NT saints to give money to purchase, rent or maintain a building for Christian worship. He specifically directs that money is given to people alone, and then, people in need.
2. There are no salaries for Christian ministers in the NT; any money given to full-time workers is on the basis of gifts received as a result of faith.
3. The tithe is an old covenant institution and is not repeated in the new covenant. In OT times the tithe was originally the only tax paid apart from redemption money and the provision of sacrificial offerings.²⁵ To impose this on modern people, who already pay income tax, VAT and National Insurance, places an onerous burden on the poor.
4. The individual must decide exactly who is the recipient of his gift; this choice must not be left to some treasurer who may spend it unwisely.
5. Giving is not restricted to a tithe; teachers who limit giving to tithing are wrong. Strict tithing lets wealthy people off any sacrificial giving and puts a heavy burden on people in poverty.
6. The argument that tithing appeared before the Mosaic Law (Gen 14:20) and is therefore not abrogated along with the Mosaic Law is fallacious. Under this reasoning, circumcision and blood sacrifice ought to continue as well. Tithing is part of the realm of shadows and not the reality in Christ.

There is no apostolic command to tithe under the New Covenant. The prime purpose of the OT tithe was to support the priestly class, the Levites who had no land, plus payment for the temple services. In the New Covenant all believers are priests as well as God's temple, there is no formal priestly caste or material temple to support. The OT tithe was also for the poor, and this principle continues. Those who preach the Gospel in full-time service (and there are comparatively few of these in the church population; many elders and even apostles worked) are to be supported (1 Cor 9:14) as the counterpart of Levites (1 Cor 9:13), but this is never said to be a tithe.

Encouragement, exhortation, admonishment and submission is in the whole body

After some development in grace, every believer should be able to teach and admonish others (Heb 5:12); it is not just elders who admonish, all can admonish.

It is common practice today that the members of the church do very little real spiritual work (they may do much manual labour) and every problem is referred to the leadership. In apostolic times this was not the case; the whole body was engaged in self-regulation, self-encouragement and self-teaching. Everyone helped everyone else, in understanding, admonishment, exhortation, wisdom and encouragement. This was to help reduce the

²⁵ In the OT, the people of the land were required to give the best animals in their herds and flocks to God as an offering. Their best was God's. Bulls and goats were not cheap, unless you were rich.

weight of the work on elders so that they could devote themselves to understanding God's word more effectively and thus teach better.

This was also a means of believers developing their gifts, which may later result in becoming an elder. Incipient gifts in a person, that are given by God, carry authority, and when this is respected by others ministry results. If a brother has wisdom he can apply that in admonishment to another brother without the involvement of the elders. If more godly believers admonished folk, there would be fewer problems in the church.

The basis of all this is mutual submission and this is based upon our equal status in justification:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28

There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all. Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. Col 3:11-13

Together we stand as one new man. The local church is to represent this one new man; as such there can be no elevated people; all are loving and submissive to all. There is no seniority above others in the body of Christ, all are one in status. There are different functions in the body and elders stand in front like fathers in order to ensure decency and order; but important decisions are to be arrived at by consensus (see Acts 15:22-23, 25).

Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Rm 15:14

Submitting to one another in the fear of God. Eph 5:21

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another. Col 3:16

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly. 1 Thess 5:14

The older women likewise ... that they admonish the young women Titus 2:3-4

Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another. 1 Pt 5:5

Contrary to this, modern churches highly elevate the leadership, even in small churches. Decision making in some older, conservative churches is by a leadership proposal submitted to in a corporate vote (as in a boardroom). But even this is not the system found in the NT, where decisions are by organic consensus. In many larger churches, and especially Charismatic churches, decisions are wholly made by the leader and then imposed on the congregation. These deny the principle of the body and the equality of all brethren. Worse still is where an authoritarian leader demands absolute and unqualified submission of the people to the leadership. This is cultic.

Furthermore, modern churches tend to make the people dependent upon leaders instead of each other. Even the smallest problem requires a stratum of leadership to fix instead of the people helping each other. This is because the idea that the people really have gifts and authority is squashed. Thus churches have developed counselling teams of one sort or another, usually employing various forms of heretical training (such as Psychoheresy or forms of emotional healing and demonic deliverance). In a Biblical situation people help each other unless the problem is serious and then an elder is needed.

Public baptism after a long period of discipleship

It is commonly accepted church practice that baptism of converts is delayed for a long time, sometimes years. Often the chief reason for this is a dependence upon immersion that requires a suitable place to submerge people and considerable preparation. Added to this, a 'baptism meeting' is convened which is usually advertised and seen as an opportunity to evangelise. Thus baptism becomes one of the biggest meetings in the church's calendar, frequently filled with unbelievers.

None of this is Biblical at all.

In apostolic times, baptism occurred immediately upon true confession of faith, even in deserts or in the middle of the night. Baptism was part and parcel of conversion. [Acts 2:38; 8:12; 8:36-38; 9:18; 10:47; 16:33] It did not require a big meeting and in one case occurred in the private quarters of a prison or a private house²⁶ (good evidence that immersion is not necessary). The important factor was the sealing of the Christian's testimony on his conscience before God. It did not have to happen in public or even in a normal church meeting. It occurred whenever a person was truly converted.

The invitation system

The invitation system is used either at a personal level by evangelists or at a public level in evangelistic meetings. It is driven by a desire to see immediate results instead of waiting on God and relying upon the Spirit to convict people in his time. It thus short-circuits a period of breaking and conviction of sin, which is a necessary precursor to repentance (2 Cor 7:9-10).

This system uses instructions to get people to physically demonstrate a response to the Gospel. At a personal level this is often by repeating a prayer recited by the evangelist or in the public meeting by raising a hand or walking to the front of the meeting to demonstrate acceptance of the Gospel message. Usually such people are told that they are born again and fully assured of eternal life whatever they do.

This method is never used in Scripture at all.

The problem is that it relies upon the emotional impact of what is said at a time when the person is insecure and vulnerable. Having been pressed in their conscience, such people are willing to do almost anything an authoritative person tells them, and as such their action is meaningless. Most of the people who respond to the Gospel in this way fall away in time and were never saved; they just gave an emotional response to someone who pushed them.

It is a technique developed by Arminians who are focused upon the will of man and not the will of God. It was often seen in the crusade evangelism of big-name evangelists such as Billy Graham. Later statistical evidence for these (including CG Finney) shows that, over time, most of the converts fell away; it was all superficial enthusiasm. This is because the conversion was a mere emotional aberration brought on by emotional pressure. Such people often cause a scandal to the church when they say publicly that they used to be a born again Christian but are now gay (or whatever). Clearly they were never regenerated but someone told them that they were because they raised a hand.

²⁶ Acts 10:47-48; 16:33.

Church growth methodologies

A full evaluation of this would take many pages and cover a number of methods, including the Seeker-Sensitive practices that we look at elsewhere in this paper. The fundamental issue with these practices is that they are based upon many unbiblical ideas in order to build a large church, and we have established that large churches in big building are not Biblical.

Central to these ideas are the works of Donald MacGavran and C Peter Wagner.²⁷ Wagner especially espouses not only Charismatic doctrines but has developed the Third Wave, signs and wonders, practices (with his late friend John Wimber) and is now leading the New Apostolic Reformation which seeks to take over the world with Pentecostal Latter Rain heresies. Delving into this is a big work in itself (which we have looked at elsewhere).

Basic to Wagner's church growth ideas is the authoritarian leadership of men called apostles and prophets who dominate the church and rule through an unbiblical hierarchy of lesser leaders. Another general founding principle is avoiding doctrinal precision so that the common basis for church mission is, so-called, spiritual life and not truth. This also enables such churches to associate and ally with others of varying theological expression. Today methodology, rather than doctrinal statements, holds churches together.

A further principle is the reliance upon social sciences (e.g. sociology, psychology and anthropology) to reach people, more than Scripture. Thus such folk constantly talk about the 'market-place' instead of the Bible. They ask questions such as, 'What are the questions people are asking?' 'Where are the natural bridges we can cross?' 'How can we speak the language of the market place so that unbelievers hear us?' Leaders in this movement unashamedly use marketing methods based on consumerism to dominate their mission strategies. This makes the Gospel a product to be pushed effectively as a bargain offer; evangelism is to consumers who buy into a product. George Barna even claimed that Jesus and the apostles were market-sensitive, seeking to minister to people's felt needs. [The Bible tells us that Jesus only did what his Father told him to do; Jesus was focused upwards not downwards.] Thus leaders study what people want, and what their interests are, to centre their evangelistic ministry around that instead of obeying Scripture.

It also leads to a phenomenological not theological approach, or a basis founded on experiences. This is one reason why modern church worship is so introspective and experience based – ignore the truth and enjoy the emotional experience. Such objectives are clearly the basis of the flawed Alpha Course where the goal is getting a sinner to experience the Holy Spirit, which is equated to conversion and not the submission to emotional stimuli that it is.

All of these ideas despise the fundamental importance of the truth of God's word as the basis of witnessing to Christ and the importance of Biblical doctrine in establishing church practice.

Anything that detracts from a simple, small church meeting in a house under a team of elders, is to be condemned as unbiblical. The church experiences natural growth as the members share the Gospel with their neighbours (their families, friends and people in their influence). As the church itself grows it comes to a point where it is natural to split and form two churches instead. Thus church growth is not forced or dominated by men, nor does it form large structures, but is (as Jesus said) like salt in the earth – small house churches multiplying unseen and without pomp or fuss.

²⁷ From the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

Ecumenism

The widespread acceptance of the principles of the Church Growth Movement have made it much easier for former conservative churches to accept ecumenical initiatives, which today are everywhere. Every year some new ecumenical church project is initiated which is supposed to be a panacea for all the church's problems.

We have earlier demonstrated that Biblical practice is to have independent, local, small house churches that may fellowship with other house churches but never form into a new type of meeting. Neither do leaders preside over a corporate body of multiple churches, nor is there a breed of leader other than an elder. These principles preclude all ecumenical institutions.

As we have seen, such ecumenism is always based upon dumbing-down of theology and developing a creed that is so superficial that anyone can accept it. Unity is embraced at the sacrifice of doctrinal truth. Furthermore experiences or phenomena become a foundation for unity. For example, a Charismatic baptism in the Holy Spirit experience is often the claimed basis of unity; something that people of all denominations claim to have. This is seen as evidence of shared life and something better than objective truth to form a foundation for relationship.

Ecumenism is thus based upon lies, compromise, doctrinal error and usually a desire for human power. The only real effect of churches joining together is that leaders get more authority and influence; nothing much changes for the church members other than exposure to false teachings and practices.

Ecumenical associations are the opposite of normal church practice.

Church doctrines

This section could be developed into a separate book since the modern church has adopted so many heretical teachings. I will limit myself to a few points relevant to practical church life.

Suffering not prosperity

The church is called to suffer in this time and experience eternal blessing in the age to come. This is why this time is called a 'vale of misery' in the *Book of Common Prayer* and a 'vale of tears' in other prayer books. It is impossible to know perfect joy and blessing in this life while we have an old nature, which grows in sinfulness, and an enemy who constantly tempts us and seeks to devour us. Only when all our enemies are overcome (the world, the flesh and the devil) at the return of Christ can we expect material blessing and perfect joy. The abundant life promised by Christ is eternal life and this is only properly experienced in the new world when we have a spiritual and perfect body.

The test of the Christian testimony is to trust in God, to be patient and to rejoice during our sufferings in this world. This is what angels long to see and what gives us the most rewards. Our tribulations are not curtailed here, but our ability to overcome them is not shortened either. God gives grace to us in our time of need so that we learn to trust in him and not our circumstances. Indeed, it is through our very afflictions and failings that we are best educated spiritually; without our sufferings we would not know God well.

Sufferings are not a problem or a failure, they are a test and part of our heavenly training. They are vital to us in learning to trust God. Neither do sufferings mean that our heads

hang low or that we are miserable all the time. The true believer learns to be content in all things, patient in endurance and joyful in God.

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God. Acts 14:22

You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. Matt 10:22

He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Jn 12:25

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. Jn 16:33

If children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*. Rm 8:17

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy. Col 1:10-11

We told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 1 Thess 3:4

Share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God. 2 Tim 1:8

If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*. 2 Tim 2:12

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2 Tim 3:12

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 1 Pt 4:12-13

Many churches, especially the Word Faith variety, teach a contrary position. They hold that all Christians are called to prosperity and have a materially elevated position on the earth. They teach that faith is human positive confession and that Christians using faith demonstratively can have anything they imagine. Some teach that this is by incubating (visualising) the object desired (in fact this is an occult technique). The overall position of such teachers is that all Christians are destined to be affluent, successful, healthy and prosperous; and this (they say) explains why they own fleets of limousines, several mansions and jet aircraft.²⁸

Even Charismatics and Pentecostals that do not go as far teach that all believers should know God's healing automatically, should be continually blessed (happy) and should be in a moderately prosperous state. Failure to grasp healing, they say, is due to a lack of faith.

Well if all this were true then Paul, the greatest ever apostle, should have been rich, happy, healthy and living at ease. In fact tells us that, he was frequently whipped and imprisoned, five times he was scourged, three times beaten with rods, once he was stoned and three times he was shipwrecked. He knew fatigue, toil, frequent sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness and deep anxiety (2 Cor 11:23-30). He knew anguish of heart, much affliction and many tears (2 Cor 2:4). He experienced burdens above measure and despaired of life (2 Cor 1:8). According to modern Charismatic notions, Paul is a miserable failure; but the word of God shows us a different story.

Modern Charismatic ideas about abundant life are the opposite of what the Gospel teaches us.

²⁸ In fact they have robbed the churches to obtain such wealth by false promises.

The Gospel is centred in God not man

This needs little exposition as we have discussed it in very many papers. Gospel presentations vary according to the weight they place upon the sovereignty of God or the sovereignty of man. Those which concentrate entirely upon the ability of man to save himself are deeply heretical and outside our remit here (such as Universalism, Socinianism & Pelagianism; note that Charles Finney's message was Pelagian in this regard). The problem in evangelical churches chiefly lies in the pollution of the Christian Gospel by placing weight on the equal co-operation of God and man in salvation. This is chiefly done in Arminian presentations and it should be noted that supposed Calvinists (and all 4-point Calvinists) often find themselves preaching an Arminian Gospel.

The Arminian Gospel itself varies according to theological thrust. Arminians accept the sin of man and the need of the cross but still emphasise the ability of man to choose salvation for himself making it a human work; at least in initiation. Many Arminians make the whole Christian life dependent upon the strength of man and those who weaken go to hell. Some teach that man chooses Christ out of innate human ability and freewill. Others admit the prior need of a general, awakening, prevenient grace; but in the end it all rests upon man's freewill.

In these schemes Christ actually saved no one in particular but merely makes salvation possible for strong-minded people. This destroys the doctrines of election, total depravity, limited atonement, and irresistible grace. God ceases to be in control of salvation, and thus of history also; the doctrine of God's sovereignty is ruined. Some modern Arminians not only affirm this with joy but also add that God cannot know the future either (Open Theists).

This emphasis on human ability and freewill in salvation is utterly unbiblical. It is not true that anyone can turn to Christ, at any time, in any way. It is not true that getting saved is merely down to a human decision; that it is man's choice that determines salvation. It is not true that salvation rests upon giving your heart to God when you feel like it. Jesus tells us:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me ... No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him ... No one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father. Jn 6:37, 44. 65

We could supply many other texts but the words of Christ are enough; no one can come to the Lord to find salvation unless God draws him.

The word 'draw' means to tug, draw, drag or to lead by force; force is required because of the inertia of the object being dragged. It is used of people drawing a sword (Mk 14:47; Jn 18:10), of a person being forcibly led drag into court (Jm 2:6), or of a net being hauled or dragged full of fish (Jn 21:6, 8). An example is Paul being dragged out of town to be stoned (Acts 14:19, 21:30).

Thus conversion is not a matter of our choosing to be saved or even of our being mildly influenced by grace. It requires a sovereign act of God to drag us kicking and screaming into the kingdom because by our own volition we would not choose to go.

The conversion of sinners is down to the sovereign choice of God in election. Only those he chooses are saved and grace is only given to those he calls and draws. God is sovereign in salvation.

The salvation of the righteous /s from the LORD. Ps 37:39

Salvation /s of the LORD. Jon 2:9

God's word not man's word

The central theme underlying all that we have written so far is that the modern church constantly prefers the words of man rather than God. What is worse is that when man's ideas conflict with God's then the source of that wrong teaching is devilish (Jm 3:6). Thus the modern church is constantly guilty of following God's enemy rather than God. This is a very serious state of affairs indeed.

In any situation we find ourselves in, that situation is governed by the direct commands in God's word and where there is no direct command (for example in the case of smoking tobacco or watching television) then we derive principles from the precedents and principles in God's word to determine the correct stance.²⁹

Whether it is a traditionalist who leans upon the way some great man in the past established a denomination, or whether it is a modern Charismatic obeying the subjective words of a supposed prophet speaking from his fleshly emotions, so many people base their actions on men and not God.

On the contrary God's people must obey Scripture, especially in the way they build the local church.

He who despises the word will be destroyed, but he who fears the commandment will be rewarded. Prov 13:13

On this *one* will I look: on *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at my word. Isa 66:2

Great peace have those who love your law, and nothing causes them to stumble. Ps 119:165

This doctrinal position is called 'the regulative principle'. It means that every aspect of church worship and service must be based upon a clear command or precedent in Scripture. Nothing is to be done in church meetings that does not have the permission of God's own word. This cuts across most of the things done in churches today (as this paper demonstrates).

This principle also rests upon the proper interpretation of Scripture and not simply wresting texts from their context to use as a support for something wrong. The overriding principle of interpretation is that Scripture must interpret Scripture. Thus Old Covenant practices cannot be imported into New Covenant church life without understanding the changes that occurred at the ascension of Christ. For example, blood offerings, a sacerdotal priesthood, a temple building and musicians are part of Old Covenant worship but are not involved in New Covenant worship. These practices symbolised spiritual truths that would be realised in the Messiah, as apostolic NT teaching makes eminently clear.

The opposite position is the 'normative principle', which was originally established by Lutherans and then adopted by Arminians to allow almost anything to take place in church meetings. It states that anything can be done as long as it is not expressly forbidden in the word. For instance, this position allows screaming, shouting, animal noises, dancing and uncontrolled laughing out loud. It is claimed that Scripture does not forbid these things directly; but God's word also tells us to behave decently and in order in church meetings (1 Cor 14:40), and to be self-controlled personally; these principles disallow such fleshly behaviour. Obviously the normative position is wrong.

²⁹ Thus we infer from 1 Cor 6:20 from that smoking is wrong and from Phil 4:8 television must be watched judiciously, watching only that which is good and pure.

Conclusion

What is the best way for the devil to ruin the work of God and despoil the church? It surely is to convince the church to abandon God's method of doing anything and adopt a new practice based on human (devilish) wisdom. Thus nothing is done according to God's will, as found in Scripture, and everything that is built is corrupted and marred. Thus even sincere Christians with high aspirations devote their lives sacrificially to doing something that is worthless or badly compromised. Sometimes people devote decades of their life to something that is even worse, being occultic, heretical and devilish.

Our only hope and certainty for a successful testimony in this world is to obey God and do everything strictly according to his holy word. If we veer away from that word we have no hope at all.

It is my contention that almost everything the modern church is doing is contrary to God's word; thus it will not succeed and will not please God. Christians must begin to see the need to form new, underground, house churches that fully comply with Scripture.

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether. More to be desired *are they* than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them your servant is warned, *and* in keeping them *there is* great reward. Ps 19:7-11

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Summary

A table to demonstrate how modern church practice is the opposite of the apostolic church. Clearly there are exceptions to this general survey, where small orthodox churches buck the national trend, but for the most part this is an accurate summary of modern issues affecting the majority of churches.

Biblical principle Divine precedent	Modern practice Opposite of divine precedent
Church structures	
The local church meets in homes.	The church (from a wide area) meets in a specific building.
There are no denominations.	There are many denominations and they keep appearing.
The local church is small.	Most churches are large (more than 20-30), or strive to be.
Leadership is by a team of elders.	Leadership is by a senior figure (minister / apostle / prophet etc.).
Elders are like fathers.	Leaders are like managers or princes.
The elders are equal in authority, there is no senior pastor.	The senior leader dominates lower ranks of leaders.
The goal of leadership is the training of all the people in godliness and developing them to minister.	Multiple goals according to the denomination. Most common is the goal to increase numbers and develop the work (empire building). This often involves getting bigger and better premises.
Leadership is serving the body.	Leadership is ruling the body.
The model of leadership is the father.	The model of leadership is, at best, the manager; at worst, the king.
Leaders are usually home grown, learning by experience and training from godly men.	Leaders are usually imported from a seminary or other institution.
Leadership is male.	Leadership is frequently male and female, especially in lower ranking leaders.
Apostles are church planters with no extraordinary power or gifts.	Apostles are archbishops over many churches.
There are no worship leaders.	Worship leading accounts for half of the meeting.
There is no deliverance ministry in churches.	Deliverance ministries are commonplace.
True leaders are broken men.	Modern leaders are powerful men.
Leaders are judged more severely.	Leaders are judged more leniently.
Church meetings	
The Lord's Supper is central.	The Lord's Supper is peripheral or ignored.
The church is run like a family.	The church is run like a business empire or a social club.
The meeting is informal and open to participation.	The meeting is formal with little or no participation.
Ministry involves mutual edification.	Ministry is by one man.
Teaching is informal and involves discussion.	Teaching is by a formal sermon.
There are no musical instruments.	There are many musical instruments; in some churches the worship is overwhelmed by loud music.
Worship is rational submission to God's majesty.	Worship is emotional and fleshly leading to idolatry and occult practices.
One simple meeting type on Sunday for gathering the flock for edification and worship, plus prayer meetings and Bible studies as required.	Multiple meetings of all sorts for all sorts of people and all sorts of events.
	Bible Weeks, camp meetings and other regional meetings.
Church meetings are centred on Christ not man.	Seeker Sensitive worldly meetings focused on sinful men.
Church practices	
The members in a church need no formal qualification or membership process. All believers are accepted.	Most churches have a two-tier system which segregates members from visitors.
Giving is as the Lord leads in the heart to the poor and needy first. Believers are accountable for this.	Giving is by a formal 10% tithe usually to the church coffers. Believers cannot control this but are still accountable.
Believers admonish one another, teach one another and submit to one another.	Believers submit to the eldership and are admonished by the leaders.
Baptism is immediate upon conversion.	Baptism is delayed and performed in a large public meeting.

There are no such things as 'evangelistic services'; evangelism is by sharing the Gospel naturally. No one is forced into making a public confession before they are certainly converted.	The invitation system is used in evangelistic services. Salvation is assured simply because they made a public gesture.
Church growth is by local churches growing naturally and then splitting to form a new house church.	Various church growth methodologies are used to produce large churches under authoritarian leadership hierarchies.
The church is restricted to a local, independent, house church meeting.	A plethora of ecumenical alliances abound.
Church doctrines	
The church is called to experience Christ's sufferings.	The church is called to be healthy, and prosperous.
God is sovereign in initiating salvation.	Man is sovereign in initiating salvation.
He who fears the commandment will be rewarded. Prov 13:13	He who despises the word will be destroyed. Prov 13:13

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