

WHERE OH WHERE CAN WE GO?

THE CHURCH SEEMS TO HAVE DIVORCED ITSELF FROM REALITY

By Shaun Kearney

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Harald Bredesen a Founding Board member of CBN &700 club.

Shaun Kearney does not have to go back to the original source he walks with Him. He is his confidante. That's why he's one of the most original men I have ever known. If you want to see people blessed and challenged, and make them want to bring their friends, and get blessed yourself, Shaun Kearney is your man.

David Schoch. Founder of Bethany Chapel Long Beach California.

Shaun Kearney is a man of God with high integrity. His ability to communicate and impart the Word of God has earned him a reputation as fine speaker and leader in this day. He has a true prophetic gift ministering in the Spirit, and I highly recommend him to your church.

WHERE OH WHERE CAN I GO?

Where can I go?
Oh where can I go?
Seeking a refuge for my soul
Needing a friend to lead me to the end
Where can I go but to the Lord?

“For all those seeking for something better than what’s on offer”.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, so that you might have fellowship with us: and our fellowship is with the Father and His Son Jesus Christ 1 John 1:3. This was the apostle’s doctrine. It’s a message so plain, that it needs little explanation, and no alteration.

When we turn back the clock, many of us can recall days of visitation when the Holy Spirit moved among us in great power. It was a time when you couldn’t stop us from gathering to pray, to fellowship, and study the word. We were aglow with the Spirit and overflowing with love for the Saviour and one another. It was so much like what John the beloved speaks of, but sadly what we once experienced seems like a dream now. The memory of those times has never left those who were there to taste and see the goodness of the Lord. Its true there can be no going back, but the desire to recapture the fervency of spirit, and experience once more the power of His Holy presence, burns in many hearts. True hearts will never settle for less than what they have known.

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, oh how we wept, when we remembered Zion”. Psalm 137:1.

The curse of sophistication and covetousness, with able assistance from the professionals who occupy our pulpits, seems to have choked the life of the Holy Spirit out of our fellowships, to the point that going to church for many couples has degenerated into a distasteful duty, as they go through the motions for the sake of their partner, and, or the children.

But I have some good news; there is a rustling in the tops of the mulberry trees.

INTRODUCTION

The burden I was feeling relating to the subject matter of this book was weighing heavily on my heart. I didn't want to alienate people, but then I didn't want to compromise its content in order to avoid criticism. Truly the fear of man is a snare; and so in order to find the right answer I began to ask myself some soul-searching questions, such as:

Have we been called to defend the Master's intentions?

Do we have to make excuses for the words of Jesus' because somebody may get offended? As I prayerfully considered these thoughts my course became clear. I would speak the truth in love, and leave the consequences to Him.

Come now, be courageous, and take a journey with me. Let's begin with "The Man in the Ivory Tower." This method is strongly recommended by church growth gurus." The senior pastor is told to avoid confrontation at all costs with members of his congregation. He must never get their blood on his hands. The dirty work should be left to his staff. He must be able to come into the pulpit with no blood on his hands so he can demonstrate his giftedness, and bring answers and consolation to the pew warmers. This approach encourages mere mortals to live in isolation from their brethren, and sets them up for a serious "fall," usually its of a moral nature. The consequences can be far reaching with many casualties. Lifted up in a fog of pride, these men believe infallibly that God has put them in the office they hold, which is to mediate on behalf of people, who, they are taught, don't know their left hand from their right. Pontificating their ideas among the ignorant, they seek to consolidate their position as they strive to make a name for themselves. Like Superman, the position of "pastor", singular, is a myth, and has no scriptural warrant. Jesus hates this doctrine of the Nicolaitanes; it is an insult to Him who alone stands as the fountainhead of all truth. When did He ever resign to become the "former" Commander in Chief; handing over His role to a fallible individual of human origin. He is the "I AM"; the ever-present one.

Strong words, yes they are strong words indeed? Words long overdue I might add. It's also high time for strong measures to be taken. The system of priestcraft, which Jesus denounced in most vitriolic terms, must be seen for what it is. We do not condemn them, but pray for them, and seek to rescue them, but we must denounce most vehemently this ungodly scheme that has pushed Christ and His table aside with impunity, to be replaced by a man in a "pulpit," with a sermon.

Large numbers of Christians, who were once active and committed to a particular church, or specific ministry, have withdrawn their support. Tired of religious systems run by money hungry professionals with personal agendas, they are doing one of two things. Either they are looking for a meaningful alternative, or have just plain given up the prospect of finding anything they want to identify with. Others are just drifting, since they no longer trust or have any respect for those they once followed.

It is not our desire to offer you another model, or suggest that we have a panacea for every problem. However we are concerned that so many disillusioned believers have just about given up any hope of ever finding something edifying, and Christ centred. It is to all of you that this effort is directed. If these revelations make you squeamish then I suggest you don't read any further.

We know what it feels like, to be just going through the motions, we have been there, and as the saying goes done that. For my wife and I our personal journey was a painful and lonely one for several years. Many times we felt like giving up, (not on Jesus), but on finding true fellowship.

Eventually we discovered that there were a lot of people out there who felt the same as we did, and the way you might be feeling right now, so take heart because He who cares is opening the eyes of saints everywhere to see His provision, one that has always been there for those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Just because you question things does not mean that you are not spiritual, it may mean that for the first time in your Christian experience you have begun to think. Nor does the dryness of your spirit necessarily mean that you have lost your faith; or the dissatisfaction in your heart mean that you have grown cold, and lost your appetite for spiritual things. But what it does mean, is that you need a change of diet, because your soul is not getting what its crying out for. What it hungers for is living bread, yes, and live food, the only kind that can satisfy the hungry soul. These symptoms are often God's only way of drawing us out of a deep religious rut, so that He can bring us into a more spiritually satisfying, and edifying way.

“Then said He, Lo, I come to do thy will O God. He takes away the first that He may establish the second” Hebrews 10:9. God often takes away things that once were positive and good, for the purpose of giving us something far better.

The Shulamite's experience is worthy of note; her lover seemed to have hidden himself from her attentions, but it was only to draw her out and increase her longing for Him. “By night on my bed I sought the one I love; I sought him, but I did not find him. "I will rise now," I said, "And go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek the one I love." I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me; I said, "Have you seen the one I love?" Scarcely had I passed them, when I found the one I love. I held him and would not let him go, until I had brought him to the house of my mother, and into the chamber of her who conceived me.” Song 3:1-4 NKJ.

Are you dry and thirsty? Then listen to His promise, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon your offspring.” Isaiah 44:3-4.

“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Isaiah. 40:27-31 NKJ.

“Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow, and I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lord.” Jeremiah 31:13-14.

HAS THE CHURCH DIVORCED ITSELF FROM REALITY?

For several years now some of us have been giving serious thought to the very make up of how we do church nowadays. I fear that the church has so separated faith issues from life concerns that it has opened up a huge gap between religiosity and reality. In so doing it discourages us from being ourselves in church, since being ourselves is presumed to be other than what's acceptable. Take for example the way we speak. This religious kind of language is so unintelligible to the man in the street that we have to leave it at the church door when we exit. Preachers sound different to the rest of us. Their religious vernacular sounds like a different dialect. If we were to conduct our business life in this manner we would be labelled as strange, or even slightly queer. This meaningless, jargon-laden preaching is the butt of many jokes among the irreligious and solicits alienation and silent rage among the faithful.

There's a sermon for every problem. Prayer fixes everything. God saves the day. The faithful triumph, the good always prosper. But our lives seem more complicated than that. It's not to say that we don't believe in the power of prayer, or the faithfulness of God, but the way it's presented publicly in church services makes it less real than it is. It's all become rather artificial and Pollyanna. When every prayer is answered, and every testimony has a happy ending, we start to feel a growing sadness that there must be something wrong, because life isn't always like that for us, or most of our friends.

As we feel increasingly alienated from the faith that's dished up in church, we have finally come to realize that testimonies don't build faith but in some cases are just a big put-down. And so over a long time now a silent, simmering kind of rage has been developing among thinking saints. So where is the avenue for the expression of these feelings of alienation and rage? Well it will not be found in the Church, since we seem to have developed a kind of monastic silence, where many of us must remain mute, and when it's all over on Sunday mornings all we are left with are our feelings of genuine emptiness and disappointment. Worse still nobody wants to talk about it, so we pretend along with everybody else that all in in the garden is rosy.

You only need three skills to get by in church these days; you have to be able to sing, to listen and to give. Singing, listening and giving, that's all you ever need to do any given Sunday. It will get you through six worship songs, a lengthy monologue, and save you any embarrassment when the offering is taken up, that's a promise. If you're not much of a listener, but more of a talker, I'm sorry but you'll just have to learn to be seen and not heard. A teachable spirit, they call it. (Have you noticed, that the only people who talk about our need to be teachable, are those who want to do the teaching?)

I am finding, as I travel among Christians of all persuasions, the same feelings of alienation, rage, sadness and silence. It's as if we're all looking for places where we, as Christians, can be ourselves and speak freely. And surely it's only through frank, honest conversation, and interaction, that genuine learning and, personal growth can take place. There has been a resurgence of house or cell groups, which some people say is the place for such interchange; and that may be so, in many churches. But when the public gathering of the faithful doesn't reflect in any significant way the private life of the community then it's irrelevant, but worse still it's deceitful. If the church continues to be a place where some people have all the say, and others have nothing to say, this silent invisible revulsion will eventually explode. People want their voices back. They want their churches back. They want to be part of a faith community and a worship experience that involves conversation, honesty, vulnerability, creativity and consensus. They do want biblical truth; but they seem to think that you can have a meaningful experience of God's presence, without sitting silently in rows, all facing the front.

PETER ANSWERS THEIR SOLEMN INQUIRY

In response to Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost the multitude were pricked in their heart, and said to Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do"? Then Peter said unto them repent, and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation". Acts 2:37-38.

Peter was referring specifically to the Jewish religious leaders, they had refused to acknowledge their Messiah because He didn't suit their idea of what the Messiah was supposed to be like, so instead they murdered Him. In very plain terms Peter was saying, "Have nothing to do with them, or their religion". With many other words he testified and exhorted them, "to save themselves." They responded to his words gladly, and were baptised: and the same day there was added unto them about three thousand souls. It does not state exactly what those many words of exhortation were that Peter gave in response to their query. But we are left in no doubt whatsoever about what they did after their baptism.

Peter's words "Save yourselves." pointed straight at the religious who thought they could rid themselves of this growing menace to their authority by crucifying Him during the feast of Passover. Be under no misapprehension, "The chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy Him" Luke 19:47. The Jewish leaders finally resorted to hiring false witnesses in order to have Him adjudged guilty.

History repeats itself, it's also prophetic. Eccles 3:10.

"Is there anything whereof it may be said, See this is new? It has already been of old time."

There is no hope of reforming any decadent Christian movement as a body. The only hope is that men will arise who see the need to call forth those whose trust is stayed on God, and once more start to move toward the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ. Many preachers are unwilling victims of a modern condition, which they secretly detest and even openly question. Most of these men realize that the position, they occupy as "The Minister" in a local congregation, is without scriptural warrant. Such men must through prayer and meditation strengthen their hearts and steel their convictions until they develop the courage to break away from tradition, and cease to cater to that which enslaves the Church. Let anything, which will steal that liberty and bring us into bondage be so obnoxious to us that we will not countenance even the faintest hint of it.

The task will be difficult, let no one doubt. The first step must be a firm resolution by each child of God to examine the sacred Scriptures for himself. Everyone who loves God must not only seek to derive spiritual food for his own growth, but he must then have a compelling urge to share his learning with his brethren for their edification and good.

Read these words of Peter's, which moved them so deeply again. And Peter replied, "Each one of you must turn from sin, return to God, and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; then you also shall receive this gift, the Holy Spirit. For Christ promised Him to each one of you who has been called by the Lord our God, and to your children and even to those in distant lands! Then Peter preached a long sermon, telling about Jesus, and strongly urging all his listeners to save themselves from the evils of their nation. And those who believed Peter were baptised---about three thousand in all! They joined with the other believers in regular attendance at the apostles' teaching sessions, and at the Communion services and prayer meetings". Acts 2:37-42 TLB.

THE NEED FOR BELONGING.

We are social creatures. A fundamental requirement common to all human existence is the need to belong. The reason for this is because we have great needs that can only be met in community. These needs are not against, but very much a part of His purposes for us. As our loving Father He has made every provision for the things we have need of, and so 6 times we are told not to be overly concerned about shelter, food and clothing. We only need to ask for them, because of our relationship to Him. However, what we only need to ask for, the gentiles must seek after.

There are some needs that God has chosen not to fill directly. True, the most important things in life are spiritual realities, but these alone won't meet all mans needs. One such need was a companion, woman. So God gave Eve to Adam, to be help, meet for him. This important need was for the purpose of procreation and companionship. Adam was commanded to be fruitful and multiply, but as long as he was alone he could not keep that command. As members of a redeemed community we have many needs. When these needs go unmet we suffer great loss. Go against the grain and suffer the consequences. 1 Cor. 12:14-21. We need to belong to something as well as someone for a reasonable sense of security. On the day of Pentecost the converted were immediately added to the church. Acts 2:47.

We are members in particular, and even though many may not feel very significant in the eyes of the clergy each one of us are significant in the eyes of God, and because we are significant we can make a contribution. When we are ignored, the whole body suffers. Some members are more prominent than others, like the nose, but all are significant. The most vital organs in a body are rarely seen. Every member with a valid contribution needs the opportunity to make it. (I'm not just talking about money. You or your money should never be at the disposal of men or institutions for their personal agendas and advancement). We will never feel significant if we cannot contribute? We also need the approval of our peers as well as God's. We need to know when we have done well. We need disapproval also for our protection, but only from those that love us. Our children need to experience all these things also. All these needs demand a stimulating environment for fulfilment. Look for what you need where you are, and if it's not there then wipe the dust off your feet. The church is a living body not an institution, or organization.

DECLARING OUR FREEDOM

There are two fundamental tenets in an open society: - Freedom of speech, and Freedom of assembly. By the 3rd century the church began to suffer the loss of both. The rank and file in churches nowadays have neither. By the time of the middle ages the true body of Christ was viewed as a sect, and persecuted as such. The intolerant institutionalised church tortured and murdered any who apposed it.

Where true believers met was not important, but why they met was.

They gathered unto Him, to experience Him.

They had no had no creed other than Christ.

Today's sectarianism can never answer His prayer for unity in John 17.

The clergy perpetuates division, schism and strife. The common people sigh for unity, but sadly they are taught prejudice, animosity, and fear, by leaders who segregate them with human creeds as barriers to prevent them from coming together.

They were not fractured into diverse groups, with clergymen who exploited them for gain, and manipulated them for political prestige. They recognised no high priest but the Son of God, who has been crowned King of Kings. If this generation is to see any rapid strides toward restoration of New Testament order, it must begin with the elimination of the whole clergy idea, under whatsoever name or system that idea is perpetuated. Labelling poison by a harmless name does not change its nature, but makes it the more dangerous. There must be a purging from our very thinking of a clergy system, which is repugnant to God.

The humble and saintly David King said in a paper, which he read at the annual meeting of the churches of Christ, in Leeds (England) in 1876: “Nothing seems more opposed to the genius of the Christian system than the recognition of a class of professionals paid for preaching, as are lawyers for pleading, and doctors for prescribing, irrespective of need”.

In the same speech he also declared: “Paying one man to fill the pulpit with a view to keep up preaching and worship acceptable to a stated congregation, whether that man be called evangelist or pastor, almost invariably exiles New Testament order”. But how shall we rid ourselves of the burden of an unscriptural clergy system?

THEY MET FOR SPIRITUAL MAINTAINENCE

“They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”. Acts 2:42. This was how they were to save themselves. We are not talking of salvation from sin, for no man can save himself, but rather what we are talking about, is deliverance from a system that could offer them no assistance with their spiritual walk with their newly found Saviour. The following instructions given to the newly converted by Peter were designed by God to meet the needs of the church in all ages. It requires no alteration, needs no amendment, and demands no improvement. The church of today can only be healthy if it follows this prototype.

Apostle's Doctrine. It's virtually impossible to separate these four activities, because they blend together. The Apostles' doctrine was that which Jesus shared with them for three years; in particular the principles that He taught over forty days prior to his ascension (Acts 1:3); and continued to speak to them by the Spirit afterwards. They had no bibles; they were receiving revelation from the Holy Spirit that was to become our Bible. It was a life where righteousness, enthusiasm, and joy prevailed.

Koinonia. This is such a precious word. A word we are more familiar with is “fellowship,” which sad to say seems to have lost much of its potency in these days; but koinonia means far more than our limited view of it. Where there is no emphasis on koinonia, church life has become a spectator religion with professionals monopolizing the ministry. This is the failure of western culture Christianity. Individualism is the order of the day. The koinonia of the early church was not like this. Neither were they a bunch of misfits just “hanging out” together swapping stories about the harm that may have been done by the iron hand of callous leadership. (As a matter of fact if we have truly walked with God it can't do us much harm at all but rather good). Neither were they a group of introverts who considered themselves to be the “select of the elect,” the inner circle who alone were privy to the deep things of God. There's nothing deeper or more profound than Jesus Christ and Him crucified to save us. Their Koinonia was rich and purposeful. It rejoiced in worshipping Him in the beauty of holiness. It was absorbed in knowing Christ in the communion of saints around His table. The Christian life to be lived as He intended must be lived in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. Individually we seek to grow through our personal relationship with Christ, but to be part of

the body requires us to come into fellowship with other believers for the purpose of provoking one another to love the Lord, each other; and to good works. God's ultimate purpose is to have a people that express His character and glory. Participating in fellowship is how individual believers become connected to the body where each member takes his place, and without interference learns to become a functioning member. May God deliver His people from all forms of religious manipulation and control?

“God is faithful by whom we were called into the fellowship (koinonia) of his son Jesus Christ.” Koinonia is something that we have been called into. 1 Corinthians 1:9.

Breaking of Bread. “I speak as to wise men, judge what I say. The cup of blessing, which we bless, is it not the (koinonia) communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the (koinonia) communion of the body of Christ” 1 Corinthians 10:15-16.

True Koinonia will always concern itself with the Lord's Table. You cannot fully function as a believer if you do not recognize this fact. It has become apparent to me that we have often overlooked the most significant event that Christ ever called us as His friends to do, and to do “oft”. And of all the imperatives in the word to His saints this is by far the most urgent. A friend enthusiastically told me once, he had just completed an exhaustive search for all the questions Jesus ever asked and discovered that there were several hundred. He said, “It stands to reason that He must have had a purpose in asking them, therefore they deserved an answer.” I heartily agreed. Then I suggested that another exercise that could bear fruit would be to find, and then respond to the imperatives of Christ, those things that Christ considered critical, urgent, pressing, crucial, necessary, and important. Of these, to come to the Lord's Table to break bread, and drink the cup in remembrance of Him is without contradiction the most important. It is an inescapable fact that He told us to do it, and keep on doing it “until He comes.” 1 Cor: 11:23-26. The imperative mood expresses a command to the hearer to perform a certain action by the order and authority of the one commanding. Thus, “This Do in remembrance of me”, 1 Corinthians 11:24, is not an “invitation”, but an absolute command requiring full obedience on the part of all hearers. It is as imperative as the command to “Repent” and to “Be baptised”. In spite of this clear command, those in charge still choose to “Do as they please”.

The first thing Adam did after he fell was to hide from the Lord. We may not be hiding consciously, but we have left His table, because sitting down to eat and drink with Him is far too threatening and serious a matter by reason of it being the place of accountability. We have become addicted to memorialising our ministries and have forgotten that God is the central fact of Christianity. With so much emphasis on becoming successful it's no wonder leaders are frightened to put their dreams under the spotlight of His Word. We are offered seven steps to this; eight ways to that; how to motivate your staff; the way to financial freedom; overcoming our fears; how to become a dynamic house church planter; maximizing our great potential; using our faith to move mountains. Our hearts have taken root in things. Things have become necessary to us in all aspects of life. “Men of God” have now taken the place “of God”. This was never His intention.

He has called us to die to self. To die without building memorials to ourselves, to die without worrying how we should be remembered. Jesus the first-born, (prototype) the pattern son, wrote no autobiography; left no physical headquarters; never built a Bible College, or ever wrote a song. He left nothing material to perpetrate His memory except bread and wine. Paul said it's no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. To exchange our life for His we have to die first.

Just a meal? Let us be quite certain the term “breaking bread” referred to in Acts 2:42, and by Paul in 1 Cor 11:20-24, is not just referring to having a meal together as some would insist, but it can take

place with a meal. “When you come together to eat it isn’t the Lord’s supper you are eating but your own.” “Can’t you do your eating and drinking at home”? Says Paul. The act of remembering the Lord’s death by the means of these two elements, bread and wine are for a spiritual purpose, and not physical nourishment. It may have followed a meal and may still do so, but the sole purpose of communion is for self-examination and gratitude, where I can remember what He did for me that fateful night, and worship the Father for His matchless gift. It is most definitely not “giving thanks by saying grace” before eating a hearty meal.

Prayer. At the final Passover they sang together and prayed. Oh how powerfully they learned to pray in the days that followed His death and resurrection as they continued steadfastly in koinonia. And Oh how God wondrously answered those prayers. The purpose of prayer is to pave the way for kingdom activity outside of the agape circle. They never gathered to pray for the Sunday services. How pathetically ridiculous! Or worse still, for the speaker, (singular) to bring a powerful message. Prayer was the only dynamic that concerned itself in anything outside of koinonia. And when they prayed, the Holy Spirit responded, and doors began to open, and things were shaken to their very foundations. Acts 16:25-26.

A prayer less Christian is a contradiction in terms, just as a stillborn child is a dead child. Prayer is the breath of the new nature in the saint, as the Word of God is its food. When the Lord sought to assure Ananias that Saul of Tarsus had been truly converted, He told him, ‘Behold, he prays’ (Acts 9:11). Many times had that self-righteous Pharisee bowed his knees before God and gone through his ‘devotions,’ but this was the first time he had ever really prayed. This distinction needs emphasizing in this day of powerless forms (2 Tim. 3:5). Those who only pray formal prayers to God don’t know Him; for ‘the spirit of grace and supplications’ (Zech. 12:10) are inseparable. God has no dumb children in His family: ‘Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him?’ (Luke 18: 7). **Yes, ‘cry’ unto Him, not merely ‘say’ their prayers.** How much coldness of heart we have to answer for! Those who have no conscience about these things will always be strangers to Christ.

Prayer according to the Scriptures. As a telephone book is to us, so should the bible be our directory in prayer. How often our desires have been just that, our desires. The Holy Scriptures have been given to us ‘that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ that includes prayer. (2 Tim. 3:17).

**Since we are required to ‘pray in the Spirit’ it follows
that our prayers ought to be according to the scriptures,
seeing that He is their Author. (Jude 20),**

It stands to reason that according to the measure in which the Word of Christ dwells in us ‘richly’ (Col. 3:16) will our petitions be in harmony with the mind of the Spirit, for ‘out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’ (Matt. 12:34). In proportion to the measure that we hide the Word in our hearts, will our prayers hit the mark and be acceptable to God. “Where with all shall a young man cleanse his way”. Jesus spoke of three ‘When’s’. When we pray; when we give and when we fast. When does not mean “if”.

We are profited from the Scriptures when we are brought to realize the profound importance of prayer. It is really quite scary that many readers and students of the Bible have no deep convictions that a definite prayer-life is as absolutely essential to a daily walking and communing with God, as it

is for deliverance from the power of indwelling sin, the seductions of the world, and the assaults of Satan. If such a conviction really gripped their hearts, they would spend far more time on their faces before God? It is an idle excuse to reply, 'A multitude of duties have to be performed and this leaves little time to pray, although it's much against my wishes.' But the fact remains that each of us takes time for what we deem imperative. Who ever lived a busier life than our Saviour? Yet who found more time for prayer? If we truly yearn to be petitioners and intercessors before God, and use all the available time we now have, He will so order things for us that we shall have more time.

The lack of positive conviction of the deep importance of prayer is plainly evidenced in the corporate life of professing Christians. God has plainly said, 'My house shall be called the house of prayer' (Matt. 21:13). Note it is not 'the house of preaching and singing,' but of prayer. Why then has the ministry of prayer in the majority of so-called alive churches become the missing ingredient? We have evangelistic campaigns, and Bible teaching conferences, but how rarely one hears of times set apart for special prayer! And what good do these 'Bible conferences' accomplish if the prayer-life of the saints is not strengthened?

'Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation' (Mark 14:38), 'In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God' (Phil. 4:6), 'Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving' (Col. 4:2), when we do these things, then we are profiting from the Scriptures.

We will profit from the Scriptures when we come to complete submission unto God. One of the Divine designs in appointing prayer as an ordinance is that we might humbly acknowledge our utter helplessness, and a look to Him from whom all our help comes.

Accepting God's answer. May we not plead in faith God's promises and expect an answer? Certainly; but it must be God's answer. Paul besought the Lord thrice to remove his thorn in the flesh; instead of doing so, the Lord gave him grace to endure it (2 Corinthians 12).

COMPONENTS OF NEW TESTAMENT LIFE

Fellowship was a worship experience; Revelation 4:11.

They ministered unto the Lord Acts 13:

They practiced accountability before the Lord and one another.

By self examination around the table they found mercy and forgiveness;

And much needed grace to help in times of need.

They ministered to one another as the Lord enabled 1 Cor 14: 22-33.

They motivated one another to love and good works Romans 12:3-21.

They never settled for a form without power 1 Cor 12:31, 2 Tim 3:5.

They rejoiced in their priestly role Hebrews 13:10-16.

They recognized they needed the mobile ministry Ephesians 4:11-13.

They discovered the power of prayer.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

This is very important. Should we meet in a special building, built for the purpose? Should we meet in a rented building? Or can the assembly meet in a home? By “home” I mean a house where a family lives. We are not saying God cannot meet anywhere with Christians. We have known Him to meet in buildings that were built as meeting places, and also in rented places. We have certainly known Him to meet in homes. Our problem is not, where can God meet; God can go anywhere, He is sovereign. Our desire is to find out where the New Testament Christians met, and whether we have any warrant from Scripture to do otherwise. If we can find out where they met, I believe we will not find a better place.

Times have not changed so much that we need to do it differently. Did they build buildings? I cannot find a place in the New Testament where they built church building. As for rented places, the only place I can find one is in Rome, where Paul rented a house in which to live while waiting to go on trial, and where people came to him. Whenever we find the church in the New Testament, we find it in a home. The minute you get your eyes on a special building, you have reverted from the New Testament way, to the Old Testament way. The Old Testament had physical buildings. The New Testament building is spiritual. The New Testament majored on a person. The Old Testament majored on a place.

The question concerning where we should worship was raised by the woman at the well. “Where is the right place to worship” she asked; is it in Jerusalem, or on this mountain?” And Christ answered very plainly, showing her that no longer is it the place that counts, but the manner of how and who you worship. Here is a complete shift in the emphasis. How sad that many groups that call themselves “churches” today spend most of their time and money on a place, yet Christ said, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” This is what the Father is seeking. If we focus on the spiritual building, rather than on a physical building, we will eliminate many pitfalls. But let us look at the Scriptures to find where the early church was meeting.

Rom. 16:3-5a. Paul speaks of Priscilla and Aquilla in verse three as, “my helpers in Christ Jesus, likewise greet the church that is in their house.”

Salute Herodion, my kinsman; “greet them that are of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.” Romans 16:11. In the original the word “household” is not there, but you have a possessive, “greet those of Narcissus, and the group that is with him.”

Then: “Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Marines, and the brethren which are with them.” Romans 16:14. This is a greeting to the church in Rome. We see the church there meeting in various homes. That was the third group in that city. Greet the ones that are with them.

Then notice: “Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all time saints which are with them.” Romans 16:15. Here we see a **fourth** group in one city. They didn’t try to buy a building to get everybody under one roof. **They just met in homes.**

“The churches of Asia salute you. Aquilla and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.” 1 Cor. 16:19. Paul is writing from Rome to Corinth. Although he doesn’t tell us where Corinth meets, it is clear that he is writing from a group that meets in a **house**, one of the same houses that he mentioned in the letter to the Romans. “And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house.”

Philemon was another who had a church in his house.

“Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert **whole houses**, teaching things they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.” Titus 1:11. He is talking about false prophets who have come and brought their false doctrine into **whole houses**; whole local assemblies of Christians. He said they have subverted whole houses. This identifies the places where the subverted groups met, they met namely in **“houses.”** “For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.” 2 Timothy 3: 6. Again, he is talking about men who will creep into **houses**, and get among groups of Christians for the purpose of perverting them.

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into **your house**, neither bid him God speed. 2 John 10. In the Greek, you don’t have the word “your”. The King James says, “If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house.”

What does he mean by, “into your house”? He means into **the place where the church meets**. Neither bid him God speed. In other words, if a false prophet wants to come into your meeting, do not let him in, and do not even wish him God speed.

In Acts, church history is laid out for us from its inception. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread **from house to house**, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.” Acts 2:46.

In these letters written by Paul years after Pentecost we still see the church meeting in homes.

The early church saints are seen meet in two places. We will seek to find out in which place the church really met. We are told, that they are with one accord in the **temple**, and breaking bread from **house to house**. The phrase “breaking bread” is a common term for the Lord’s Supper, and we know Christians only partook of the Lord’s Supper.

The very first gathering of the fledgling church in the New Testament is recorded in Acts 2:42-46 where are they taking the Lord’s Supper from **house to house**. The reason it says from **house to house** is because there were thousands of Christians in Jerusalem. Three thousand were saved at one time. Where are they meeting? in **houses** of course. They are having the Lord’s Supper in their **homes**, breaking bread from **house to house**.

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.” Acts 8:3. Saul is tearing up the church, arresting all the Christians he can find. **Where is he finding them?** “Entering in every house.” Where is the church meeting? **In houses!** They had not built a chapel, or a church building.

“And he departed thence entering into a certain man’s house named Justus one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.” Acts 18:7. Here we have Paul going in Corinth to join himself to a Christian, one that worships God. And where does he meet? He meets in a man’s **house**, next door to the synagogue.

“I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.” Acts 20:20. That is, the public preaching of the gospel to lost people, but also from **house to house**, he met with Christians.

“The next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the **house** of Philip, the evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him. The same had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, a certain prophet came down from Judea named Agabus.” Acts 21.8-10.

In this city, where did the church meet? They met in the **house** of an evangelist. Here they met for many days. It is very evident that **the early church met in homes**.

Now for the matter of the temple. “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house.” Acts 2:46a.

In the Greek, there are two words that are translated “temple”, in English, we have only one. One of these words means the inner sanctuary of the temple, where only the priests could go. The holy place and the holy of holies, was called the temple. The other word meant the temple area, the court, and all the environs of it. Now, the Holy Spirit was careful to pick the right word. When he talks about Christians going to the temple, or being in the temple with one accord, He always uses the word that means the general area of the temple. This then is the word He uses here, to show that they went up to the temple area, where they knew they would find many people. The word that means the inner sanctuary is not used here. We find it also in Acts 5:42: “Daily in the temple, **and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ**”.

We understand that the temple area was where the unsaved were. The Christians met in **houses**. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the **market** daily with them that met with him. Acts 17:17. Here the daily activity of the apostles is seen in the **market place** in this particular city. This is where the early Christians went to speak to people about Christ, but they met in **houses** with other Christians **for edification and worship**.

THE EPHESIAN MINISTRY WAS MOBILE

In Ephesians 4:11-13 it is clear that Christ bestows special abilities on some of his saints so that they can help “prepare” the rest for “works of service.” He uses elders (plural), for example, to “feed” his flock (cf. Acts 20:28), and the sound teaching they are to provide is certainly an important part of assembly life. The dominant role that tradition assigns to one specially ordained “minister” (singular), however, is totally without a New Testament foundation.

The “Elders” were exactly what the word implies. They were older men whose children were off their hands, thereby leaving them free to devote themselves to the work. They were a resource of wisdom and experience. They were not overbearing, nor did they seek to assert their authority, or throw their weight around. Like surf lifeguards at the beach, they were watching lest any got into difficulty, but they were not telling everyone how they should swim. The Ephesians gifts were itinerant; that is, they did not settle down and become established in one place, exercising their gift among the same group of saints, year in, and year out.

Don Dunn commenting on the matter of mobile ministry says; “The plans of God for the redemption of mankind were hidden in His heart from eternity past. He would send part of Himself as a Redeemer at a certain time, but how would the future be provided for? The Redeemer would need to have a period of earthly ministry to pass on the Truth of God’s plan. To really make sure that humanity received the pure Good News until His return, the Redeemer planned to individually call people to that task, both during His earthly ministry and after His ascension to Heaven. During His earthly

ministry, Jesus and the band of individually called ones, travelled around “doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed by the devil.” When Jesus called the first group of disciples by name to be His followers, the first “mobile ministry” team was born. Everything that we now know as the New Testament Church emerged from the dedicated labour of these people and those who subsequently heard that individual call to serve Him in this way.

We are given an insight into the importance of these people when we read in Acts 1 that Jesus spent 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension “teaching them about the Kingdom of God”. Immediately after He ascended we are given a series of windows into the life of the early church. In Acts 1 they knew exactly what to do even though the Lord Jesus was now no longer physically with them. In Acts 2 they received what they needed and set out to establish church life that overwhelms us with awe Acts 2:42-47. In Acts 3 we are shown how they were ready to be led by the Holy Spirit, and in Acts 4 that they knew how to deal with attacking forces.

To make the church lose its way, become ineffectual and introduce error, the enemy of our souls needed to weaken, and then destroy the mobile ministry. Of course, over the centuries, he has never been entirely successful, but he has done an immense amount of damage. For example, most Christians today regard the mobile ministry, as an unnecessary, optional extra!

That is exactly the reason why restoration must include the New Testament-type mobile ministry as well as recognition of the priesthood of all believers. These individually called people must be encouraged to network and to move out, under the leadership of Jesus, to help, encourage, strengthen, teach, and advise the restoration families that are emerging throughout the world. Check their validity, by all means, but then receive them with joy!” See Ephesians 4:7-16.

THEY MINISTERED FIRST UNTO THE LORD

“Thou art worthy O Lord, to receive Glory and honour and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are created.” Rev. 4:11.

“But the hour cometh, and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth for the Father Seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:23-24.

C.S.Lewis in, “Reflections on the Psalms” explains: “It is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence and mind to men”.

We have no hesitation when we say that the Church’s greatest ministry in Antioch was its ministry to the Lord. In Acts 13:2 it says, while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Note it was while its members were worshipping, that the Holy Ghost manifested His presence, spoke, gave guidance, separated and commissioned these servants of His for the evangelisation of the gentile world. Ministry to the Lord has the highest priority, certainly before our ministry to one another, or world evangelism. When we have the right focus on God, we’ll have the right focus on the Work. Worshippers make the best workers.

The uppermost thing in the heart of God for us is ministry Romans 8:28,29. Mark 10:45. Immediately we hear a statement like that we think of the great commission, the task of taking world for God.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The order is the Lord first; then to each another; and then, and not before, to the world. The whole purpose of creation is to worship Him. There is no higher ministry than “Ministry to the Lord.” It must be so because here is the source of our strength Isaiah 40:29-31; however we must avoid the trap that many have fallen into, where they began to prefer to worship their worship instead of the Lord.

In this visitation we are learning to minister horizontally and that’s wonderful, but we are woefully off the mark if we think that’s all there is to koinonia. Blessed as it may be, on its own it can become destructive as well as unsatisfying. God never intended that the horizontal should meet all our needs. The good often becomes the enemy of the best. Precious as it can be, it won’t sustain us in times of great difficulty, only God can do that, and because we can hide in a crowd God sometimes has to isolate us in order to get our attention. He did it to Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and with John the Baptist.

I am concerned about some aspects of this present visitation. It is not my intention to downplay the importance of our need for ministry to each other, but rather to see it enriched. Yet from what I am experiencing, I feel that we are in danger if not already guilty of emphasizing our ministry to one another at the expense of ministering to the Lord. In our desire to throw off the shackles of ritual and habit, are we going too far? A case in point is; in their rush to accept the Holy Spirit experience many saints from Open Brethren assemblies unwittingly accepted (the doctrine of the Nicoitans), the Pastor, singular. They failed to realize what inevitably follows such a move is that one man in a pulpit becomes the focal point of the gathering, replacing fellowship around the table.

This was not the case at Antioch, Surely we who have paid a price for this precious freedom we now enjoy are mature enough to realize that the Christians at Antioch were not trying to bring the presence of God into their midst via a song service? Nor were they conducting a worship service because it was the only way they could invoke God’s presence into the service, if we do then to put it bluntly we have some growing up to do. They weren’t trying to get His attention they knew they had that. They did to give Him theirs, completely and fully.

To believe that because the Old Covenant saints never enjoyed the indwelling Spirit as we do, there is little we can learn from them about worship is wrong. While to assume that because we live under a better covenant we are automatically a wiser and better people is perhaps a little conceited? It is said of Abraham that he was the friend of God. He was unique in every way. Abraham believed God, and his faith was accounted unto him for righteousness. He believed unto righteousness before Calvary. Has there ever been another human being like Moses who has spoken face to face with God? God personally arranged and attended this man’s funeral. Angels fought over his body. It is said that David was a man after God’s own heart. Enoch walked with God in reality and he was translated that he should not see death. Before he was translated he had this testimony that he pleased God. These all experienced God in reality, tasting of the power of an age yet to come. All this took place before Christ. Can it be said about us that we please God; I sincerely trust that this is our desire also. In the light of these revelations perhaps we need to take another look at revivals under the old covenant and see what we might humbly learn 1 Cor 10:11.

We have many examples of how they worshipped the Lord in the N.T.

“You also as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ”. 1 Peter 2:5.

Firstly we are living stones. Secondly a spiritual house, and lastly we are a holy priesthood for the purpose of offering spiritual sacrifices.

Next we are plainly admonished to sing spiritual songs under the new covenant. “Remember what Christ taught you, and let His words enrich your lives and make you wise; teach them to each other and sing them out in psalms and spiritual songs, singing to the Lord with thankful hearts”. Colossians 3:16.AMP.

“Be not drunk with wine; but be filled with the spirit speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with all your heart art to the Lord”. Ephesians 5:18-20 RSV.

Hebrews 13:10 tells us we have an altar; not for the purpose of offering animal sacrifices, but to offer praise.

An Old Testament model in Leviticus 21:6.

“Present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God”. Here God identifies the offerings of the priests as His food, not that God needed actual meat and grain to eat, but it pointed to His claim on the sacrifice. The satisfaction He sought is found in the tabernacle sacrifices. He wanted worship.

As often as His people expected to eat, God expected His portion of the sacrifice. If this is what He requested under the “shadow of better things to come” (and He received it every evening and every morning with bread and wine Num 28:1-10.) how much more does He desire this from us who live on the resurrection side of the cross. “Evening and morning and noon shall I cry and sing aloud, and thou shalt hear my voice”.

Picture if you will, the priest taking the sacrifice and slaying it. Then he divides it according to God’s command to Moses. The smoke of the sacrifice ascends as a sweet smelling savour as it burned with fire, thus did the Lord consume His portion. Not only did God provide the sacrifice, but the fire also by which it burned came from Him at Sinai. From that time on it was the priest’s task to keep the fire burning. The priest’s portion was roasted upon the altar and then consumed. Thus God is satisfied, and the priesthood is sustained, each by the same sacrifice. All the work at the altar pictured God’s work in Christ. The implied message is clear: God wants to be richly rewarded with worship. It is like food to Him. He wants it lovingly prepared; constantly remembered; generously and gratefully offered, nothing but Christ will satisfy. We also must feed on Him. The priest inspected the lamb, not the man, and if his lamb was accepted so was the man. Likewise we are accepted in the beloved. “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. It is the spirit that comes alive, the flesh profits nothing, the words that I speak unto you are spirit and they are life”. John 6:53,63.

Who hasn’t come to a table famished, and left it still feeling hungry?

Since the cross, no better food than Christ can be found for God’s servants. He is the main course, because He is the essential ingredient that makes true worship possible. Those who commune with God know the value of Jesus’ flesh and blood. Often we offer Him a plate filled with things he never ordered, such as a service; or a program of songs about me; my; us and we, followed by a monologue, and thus God is starved and denied His portion because we never set the table for Him. Adulterated

food will not do for God. The Father seeks a people who are consumed with loving gratitude for the Son of His love, who offered himself by the eternal Spirit unto God for our salvation.

“Thou hast prepared a table for me in the presence of my enemies”. Psalm 23:5.

“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” The distinguishing mark of lovers of God is that they fellowship the Father and the Son sitting at the table He has prepared for them”. 1 John 1:3.

“Ye” literally means “You all.” Collectively are the Temple of God. It takes more than one brick to make a temple. Real fellowship implies much more than just sharing our lives with one another. Our fellowship is also with the Father and the Son.

It must include them in fact.

How can this become a reality in our lives? It has been made possible through the Fathers unspeakable gift to us, His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, memorialised often with bread and wine by a grateful (the most unfelt of all human emotions) church. Fellowship that does not lead us to worship the Father thus misses the mark. “The true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship him” John 4:23, Romans 1:21, Psalm 106:13,21, 44-46.

**Old Testament saints understood that sacrifice was central to worship
And it is wrong to assume that Christian worship is any different.**

Although Our Lord Jesus made one final sacrifice for our sins, never to be repeated, we are to offer what Peter calls “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” This is done when one’s whole attention is focused upon God’s unspeakable gift, around a table with two elements, bread and wine, as we are lost in wonder, love and overflowing praise. If we tarry there He will respond to us and show us the way in which we should go.

“Whoso offers praise glorifies me”. Psalm 50:23. “Thou art Holy O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel”. Psalm 22:3. Phil 3:3 we are the true circumcision who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus putting no confidence in the flesh. Luke 19:37-40 Jesus’ triumphant entry.

“They sang praises at midnight unto God and the prisoners heard them”. The result was an earthquake, and a church was born. Acts 16:25-26.

Jonah repented and nothing happened; he prayed and nothing happened; but after he offered the sacrifice of thanksgiving, God had the fish take him to Nineveh. Jonah 1:9-10.

“Through Jesus therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name”. Hebrews 13:15.

The law of displacement:

When we worship and pray in the spirit things two happen. Jesus is being exalted, and we are ushered into another environment. The law of displacement in physics tells us that when you fill a container

with water it displaces what was there before. Worship Him and He becomes the focus of our attention. He has given us His attention all our lives, but in worship He gets ours, this sets up His throne bringing a response by a Spirit empowered word Acts 13:10, John 6:63.

Brethren, do you want more than what you're experiencing? I do. Do you want more besides sitting around and discussing the word? I do. I want to meet with people that love to worship. And worship with people that love to pray.

I want to participate in corporate worship and celebration that remembers His sacrifice. The Lord's Table helps us to do that. To assist us we need the ministry of the minstrel in our midst, the true house of the Lord. We don't need performers; we want sensitive worshippers. To this agree the words of the prophets. I will build again the Tabernacle of David.

When you find a people that love to praise God at all times you will have found a people you will want to become a part of. In that kind of an atmosphere we can expect God to respond in many and varied ways; with miracles, and healing; in deliverance and in guidance, so He can involve us in His Great Enterprise.

EVERY MAN A MINISTER

First century Christians did not speak of "entering the ministry". They were already in it. Everyone entered the ministry at baptism. To be in Christ was to be in the ministry. Nobody went to an institution to study for it. Each week this priesthood of believers gathered about a table with two elements. They spoke to each other to build up, stir up and cheer up. Their talks were not formal stilted sermons. A number of brethren participated, speaking one by one, that all might be edified and all might be comforted 1 Cor 14:26.

David Brown (c.1898) made the following observations when dealing with 1 Corinthians 14:26. The Christian church in assembly, on the same occasion, might have several speakers to address them. If this be so:

1. Should Christian teaching be regarded as a profession? It certainly is now. Men are brought up in it, trained for it, and live by it, in the same manner as architects, lawyers, and doctors.
2. Is the Christian church justified in confining its attention to the ministry of one man? In most modern congregations there are some Christian men who, by natural ability, by experimental knowledge and inspiration, are far more qualified to instruct and comfort the people than their professional and acknowledged minister. Surely official preaching has no authority, either in Scripture, reason, or experience, and it must come to an end sooner or later. Were the half-hour allotted in church services for the sermon to be occupied by three or four Christly men with the capability of expression withal, it would not only be far more interesting, but more profitably spent than now. (The Pulpit Commentary, p.459). Assemblies everywhere would do well to take another look at the traditional way of doing things. To stubbornly defend historical patterns that lack New Testament warrant actually stifle the intended goal of body growth unfolded in Ephesians 4:7-16.

1 Corinthians 14:26-33 when we come together.

It makes for interesting reading when one realizes what some of the great expositors of yesteryear had to say about this passage of scripture. One can only surmise that correct exegesis seemed more to the liking of many of these men, than “living out the scriptures”. It is also true that a good many of these great expositors were never committed to one congregation, and rarely attended “Church” services except to speak.

William Barclay says of this section in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 that Paul comes with some very practical advice. He is determined that anyone who possesses a gift should receive every chance to exercise it, but he is equally determined that the gatherings of the Church should not thereby become a kind of competitive disorder. Only two or three are to exercise the gift of tongues, and then only if there is someone there to interpret. All have the gift of prophecy, but again only two or three are to exercise it; and if someone among the worshippers has the conviction that he has received a special message, the man who is speaking must give way, and give him the opportunity to express it. The man who is speaking can perfectly well do so, and need not say that he is carried away by inspiration and cannot stop, because the preacher is able to control his own spirit. There must be liberty, but there must be no disorder.

This Corinthian letter sheds a deluge of light on how saints gathered in the early Church. There was obviously a freedom and informality about it, which is completely foreign to our modern methods and ideas. From this passage two very important questions emerge.

1. Clearly the early Church had no professional ministry. True, the apostles stood out with a very special authority; but at this stage the Church had no professional local ministry.

2. It was open to anyone who had a gift to use that gift in the churches that Paul planted. Has the Church been wrong in instituting a professional ministry? The answer to that is a hefty “YES”.

Barclay gives his reasons for why things are now the way they are when he says, “Clearly there is something essential in that, in our busy age when men are so preoccupied with material things, **one man should be set apart to live close to God and to bring to his fellow men the truth and the guidance** and the comfort which God gives to him”. (His comment is the product of carnal reasoning, a convenient way to push the truth aside for human expediency. But then he can be excused because of his background. It is a remarkable fact that he attempted to deal with passage as much as he did). *My comment.*

He goes on to say, “it is certainly a mistake to think that **only** the professional ministry can ever bring God’s truth to men. There was obviously flexibility about the order of service in the early Church, which is now totally lacking. There was clearly no settled order at all. Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give it. It may well be that we set far too much store on formality and order nowadays. The really notable thing about an early Church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling that he had both the privilege and the obligation of contributing something to it. A man did not come with the sole intention of being a passive listener. He came not only to receive, but also to give. Obviously this had its dangers for it is clear that in Corinth there were **those who were too fond of the sound of their own voices**; but nonetheless the Church must have been in those days much more the real possession of the ordinary Christian.

It may well be that the Church lost something when she delegated so much to the professional ministry and left so little to the ordinary Church member; and it may well be that the blame lies not with the ministry for annexing those rights, but with the laity for abandoning them, because it is all too true that there are many members whose attitude is that they think far more of what the Church

can do for them than of what they can do for the Church, and who are very ready to criticize what is done but very unready to take any share in doing the Church's work themselves.

Believers' Gatherings did not revolve around one individual. Can we truly handle New Testament truth responsibly and still suggest that it is Christ's will for the same man's sermons to be the central focus of every weekly gathering? Every glimpse we have of those early assembly times points to an informal, participatory format. Exegetes uniformly admit to this fact. Paul's most detailed remarks on Christian gatherings, such as in 1 Cor. 14, encourage various forms of participation with the possibility of multiple speakers who humbly subject themselves to a free and open evaluation by the rest. It is a model that assumes a many-member involvement, not just a one-man show (1 Cor. 12:7,14). When a man becomes a professional preacher there is the obvious danger that **because he is paid to say something he will do so even if he really has nothing to say.** We most definitely have become slaves to the order of service.

While people would attempt to escape the implications of 1 Cor. 14 by telling us that the circumstances were peculiar to the first century and have little practical relevance for us now. In my experience, however, most of those who promote such a view manifest a serious inconsistency. While they are quick to **play down** the participatory elements of 1 Cor. 14:26 on cultural grounds, they are just as quick to ignore the cultural background to the teaching about the "silence" of women in Vs 34-35 and **literally apply** the restriction as an unbreakable absolute.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST THEY MINISTERED TO THE WORLD

We need to realize that the task of bringing the world to Christ belongs to every saint. Let us be quite clear however about this fact. Our world is the community around us, and anywhere that the Holy Spirit sends us. The first truly literary assailant of Christianity was Celsus, who early in the 2nd century taunted God's congregation with the fact that "wool-workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and vulgar of mankind, were zealous preachers of the gospel." In the primitive church the saints met to worship and scattered to preach. The bench of the cobbler, the plough handles of the farmer, the desk of the tax collector; these were the only pulpits known. The Christians took the good news to the world; they did not build houses and tell the world to come.

F.B.Meyer says, 'The advance of the Kingdom of God is determined much by each one of us saying to our neighbour', "Know the Lord!"

We can begin with our next of kin.

Andrew's testimony and confession brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42). And whatever blessing came to the Church, and to the world through the testimony and confession of Peter must be partly credited to his brother Andrew.

We must confess Christ to our nearest friends.

Philip found Nathaniel. Our friends expect that we should let them share our inner thoughts and experience. Sometimes we can only give our simple testimony: "We have found Christ," but as we bring those whom we love to Christ, we shall ever find Him sympathetic and willing to meet our endeavours with His mighty help and fellowship. How He welcomed Peter, and read the character of Nathaniel.

Our personal testimony is invaluable. The woman of Samaria brought the entire city to the feet of Jesus by her confession. Many of the Samaritans believed on Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, "He told me all that ever I did." That was the beginning of a great revival.

GOD IS NOT A KILL-JOY

“All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God”. 1 Cor. 10:23,31.

“Come apart unto a desert place and rest awhile”. Mark 6:31. The leaders of organised religious systems seem to think they own their key people. Should they miss a couple of meetings for any reason and they will haul them over the coals for their lack of commitment. Surely the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. The old adage, “All work and no play make Johnny a dull boy” is a true one. For physical, mental, and spiritual well-being we need days when the machinery of life has time to cool. We all need to find ways of re-creating exhausted grey-matter, which is being used up in long application to study or work. “Recreation” is a good word, and is preferable to Pastime. We should never be guilty of just “killing time”, nor should the term burnout ever describe a Christian’s condition. Neither should we let pastors to put a guilt trip on us for taking time off for recreation. When you’re so busy doing things (supposedly) for God that you don’t have any time to re-create your life, your obvious problem is that you are too busy doing **SOMEBODY ELSE’S** thing and not **HIS**!

One of the first things we need is a lawful, healthy recreation. Parents and couples need to do it together, and with their children. There is really no limit to the recreations in which Christians can indulge; the more the better, so long as they are re-creative; and are not the end, but the means to the end. That is, they must edify, and build us up physically and mentally so that we may apply ourselves to the main business of life. When people neglect their real business in order to indulge in their sports, then these things in turn begin to pull down and destroy.

Probably the words “edify not” put in a plea on the behalf of others. We should not indulge in things, which though they may be lawful enough and innocent, might have a prejudicial effect on those who are watching every movement of our life.

“Do all to the glory of God.” So many seem afraid of joy! They fear if they are too happy, God will send some trouble to bring them down to earth. How different is the command in Deut. 26:11 and Phil. 4:4.

WHAT THEY NEVER RELIED UPON

They never relied upon one man; a professional medium called the “pastor”, they went directly to God personally.

They didn’t go to moneylenders for the purpose of taking out mortgages to build Temples.

They didn’t build Temples to house their god, as do heathen religions.

They didn’t use pulpits.

They didn’t run seminars for the purpose of extracting religious taxes.

They didn’t use worship leaders to whip up their emotions.

They didn’t use titles.

They didn’t talk funny and wear fancy dress.

They didn’t deliver sermons.

They didn’t need choirs.

They didn’t have Bank Machines in the foyer.

They had no seminaries, bible schools, or political aspirations.

In fact they didn't rely on anything religionists think is absolutely necessary nowadays. Whoopee!

Philip Yancey, writing in *Christianity Today*, having talked about how his church experience encouraged him to dislike himself, to be always questing to be someone/something different, says, "Ultimately, I came to see that my entire project of reconstructing my personality had been misguided. God did not want to work with a wholly different personality, he chose me, as I was".

Since God accepts us as we are, surely we ought to expect our churches to do the same thing. Don't let those religionists lead you around by the nose. Be a true son; be led by the Spirit.

WHAT THEY WOULDNT TOLERATE

Judaisers in the midst.

Paul rebukes Peter at Antioch: This was a momentous epoch in apostolic history. The whole future of Christianity was involved in it. The fact that the contention broke out at Antioch, the centre and mother city of the Gentile churches, where Barnabas and Paul, their two great founders, had for seven years laboured side by side; and that the entire body of the liberal Jewish Christians there, and "even Barnabas" were "carried away" by Judaist agitation; and, above all, that "Peter" lent his name to it, who was far and away the most revered and influential man in the whole Church. All this made the occasion one of extreme gravity and peril. Paul had to stand-alone and resist the entire force and weight of Jewish opinion. His protest convicted Peter of "dissimulation," and called him to rethink and repent of his mistake. But the error of the Jewish apostle, so openly committed, and so well calculated to encourage the legalistic party, could not fail to have disastrous consequences.

The Judaisers proceeded now to carry the war into the enemy's country. They made their way to the Pauline churches, where doubtless they found sympathisers amongst their countrymen; and they brought into play all the arts they could command to undermine the authority of the Gentile apostle, to poison the minds of his converts, and to graft the principles of their own Judaism upon the faith that Gentile believers had received from his lips. Added to all his other dangers and trials, the apostle was now "in perils among false brethren". 2 Cor. 11:26.

It was to address this problem that the epistle to the Galatians was written. Things have changed very little since those times. We must stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free.

PAUL GOADS SAINTS INTO ACTION

Romans 12: Here again we have Paul goading the saints into spiritual activity. This entire chapter is calling us to action. It tells us not only what we as members in particular ought to be doing, but how we can be stirred into action.

STEWARDSHIP

One definition is the practice of systematic and proportionate giving of time, abilities, and material possessions based on the conviction that these are a trust from God to be used in His service for the promotion, and the benefit of His Kingdom.

Salvation makes us (potentially) an heir; but faithful stewardship gives us our (reward) inheritance. Let it be very clear from the outset, we are the Lord's stewards. It was never God's intention that we become the property of another (pastor) to do his bidding, or become some denominations lap dog. The term "Armour bearer" is not New Testament theology or thinking. We should wear our own armour, and carry our own weapons. That whole concept is disgusting. We were born free men and women, not slaves to earthly things. Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. Further more, the Holy Spirit should direct all of our giving. The need may be presented, but our response should only be as the Holy Spirit prompts.

"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth". Genesis 1:26-28. NKJ.

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth".

"Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it" Gen 2:15 NKJ.

The man did not own the Garden, but God gave him stewardship over the Garden to cultivate and keep out all intruders. When you do it, and do it well, God will make you ruler over it.

"So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life". Genesis 3:24 NKJ.

Whenever there is a failure in stewardship there is a loss in fellowship. Adam lost his job and a lot more besides.

The closest person to the master was his faithful steward. Abraham's steward Eleazer held a position of great responsibility. Apart from his master he was the most important person in the house. To him was entrusted the responsibility of finding a wife for his master's son and heir. His was a position of great trust and power. Joseph in Egypt is a wonderful example. Look at the tremendous authority his faithful stewardship gave him over all the affairs of Pharaoh.

"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful". 1Cor 4:1-2. We cannot take this responsibility lightly. All our time, abilities and our possessions, have been given to us to administer, they are not ours. We literally have nothing that we didn't receive from God apart from our sin.

Nothing we have is ours. We are simply stewards over it. We must learn to hold on to our possessions loosely, and not tightly. Our basic problem is we are acquisitive by nature. We take things up very

readily, but how few of us have the power to lay them down again. How willing are we to yield to the altar, as did Isaac? We are not just talking about dollars and cents, but everything we acquire.

“For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us shall give account of himself to God”. Rom 14:11-12 NKJ

“Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Phil 4:15-18.

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. 1 Cor 6:19-20 NKJ.

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out”. 1Tim 6:7 NKJ.

“Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?

It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns.

I tell you the truth; he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk.

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked”. Luke 12:41-48.

“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need”. Eph 4:28 NKJ.

“His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’. Matt 25:21 NKJ.

He will not say well done if you haven't done well. Neither will He call you good and faithful unless you were good and faithful.

DON'T BE IGNORANT CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

“Now concerning spiritual gifts brethren I would not have you ignorant”. 1 Cor 12:1.
Ignorance can be the result in being ill informed, or lack of education.

“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong, that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith”. Rom 1:11-12.

“That in everything you are enriched by Him in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ”. 1 Corinthians 1:5-7

“One thing have I DESIRED of the Lord and that will I SEEK after”. Psalm 27:4.

Coveting earnestly 1 Cor 12:31 “But covet earnestly the best gifts”.

Desire comes from ambition. Ambition is absolutely positive when it is rightly motivated.

“Follow after charity and desire spiritual gifts”. 1 Cor 14:1.

“For as much as you are zealous for spiritual gifts, seek to excel to edify the church”. 1 Cor 14:12.

Gifts are abilities given by the Holy Spirit. The excellent way is to do with character.

Two things measure spiritual maturity, character, and ability. You need two wings to fly.

Character is that attribute that makes a servant fit for the Masters use. Ability is given by the Holy Spirit to enable a person to demonstrate the power of the gospel. The fruit and power of God work hand in hand.

Jesus moved with compassion, He did something about what he saw. He healed all that came to Him. Jesus commanded no one to preach the gospel to which He didn't give ability to demonstrate God's power.

“Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick”. Luke 9:1-2.

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, the Kingdom of God has come nigh unto you. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and nothing shall by any means hurt you”. Luke 10:1, 9, 17-19.

When Christianity degenerates into formalism and ecclesiastical systems without spiritual power Satan is not in the least concerned. What God is looking for is a physical expression of the throne of Christ in the midst of His people. He wants a practical expression that goes beyond presenting doctrine and teaching, to training and equipping with weapons of warfare. He wants a demonstration of Kingdom life and power.

Where there is an organization or institution without spiritual character or heavenly nature, and there is profession without visible reality, its course goes more or less unchecked, and Satan couldn't care less but is rather pleased. But the enemy is bitterly opposed to any living organic expression of Christ in his territory, for such represents the throne of God in his domain. That's why so often when we start seeking for a demonstration of the physical presence of that which God desires, we run into the most tremendous opposition that at times seems so unnatural, and out of proportion with who we seem to be. Yet we must recognize there is an underlying force, the forces of hell that seek to destroy this expression of the throne of God in the midst of His people, for he knows that it represents to him his greatest danger, and ultimately his defeat.

MINISTERING THE SPIRIT

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter of the word, but of the spirit, for the letter kills but the spirit brings life”. 2 Corinthians 3:6.

“He therefore that ministers to you the spirit, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or the hearing of faith?” Galatians 3:5.

Well I think the answer to that is obvious, and the writer to this epistle seems to think so also. That we have been called to minister the Spirit is beyond question, yet this vital aspect of the ministry has been largely ignored. We have become giants in the word, and dwarfs in the spirit, experts in theology and novices in practice. The bulk of much rhetoric and written material is nothing more than information, and most of what is taught in seminaries is unusable. Shadows and types never healed a sick person, cast out a devil, or saved a soul.

“Jesus answered and said; ye do err not knowing the scriptures or the power of God” Matthew 22:29.

Where are the Miracle workers; the scripture speaks of them, “To another the working of miracles”, “After that miracles” 1 Cor 12:28. We are like men with a leg or arm missing. Yes we absolutely need the scriptures, but not just to debate over, but also to do what they say. It is not a matter of one as opposed to the other, but both working in harmony with each other. He that works miracles asks Paul, does he do it by works, or by the hearing of faith. It takes faith to minister the spirit. Whether it's prophecy, speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing the sick, casting out devils, working miracles, having a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, or a word of faith? There common denominator in the afore mentioned is faith. How do I get it? It comes by hearing what the Holy Spirit is saying. Ministering the spirit transports us into the front line of the battle, into the spiritual arena. It brings us into contact with the enemy. We enter into conflict, and move out of theory into reality, wrestling and overcoming principalities and powers in the spirit. It takes study to minister the word, but the hearing of faith to minister the spirit of God. The early church ministered in power without the written word of the New Testament, yet signs and wonders were the order of the day. It takes a lot of preparation, but very little faith to preach a sermon with an introduction, three points and a conclusion. But it takes a hearing ear to know what the Spirit is saying and respond accordingly.

Many a messenger spends all of his spiritual energy on his argument and neglects the power gifts. Beloved, buy up every opportunity to pray for the sick and oppressed, and thereby allow God to demonstrate His power and love.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” Luke 4:18-19.

It's not just our sermons, but also the release of His power that does the job. Let him that hath an ear hear what the Spirit says. We all have ears, so why not use them for His glory.

SEED TIME AND HARVEST

Everything living thing began in seed form. God doesn't plant full-grown trees He plants seeds.

“For the earth brings forth first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear”. Mark 4:28.

The early church was seedtime. The church in these last days is living in harvest time. The early church commenced its ministry with an awesome demonstration of the power of God in its midst. In its infancy, under the leadership of immature men who only a few days earlier were in hiding as they sought to save themselves from the same fate as their master, God turned their world upside-down.

What had happened to these men? Obviously they had been endured with power from on high. The power and gifts attendant with it, have never been taken away from the church. They may have been neglected, and fallen into disuse, but they are still available today. Paul says, “Coming behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of the Lord” 1 Cor 1:7. To the best of my knowledge Jesus has not physically returned, and if that is the case, then the church should seeking to walk in the power of the Spirit, demonstrating every gift in its message.

“Be patient therefore brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. The husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until He receives the early and latter rain”. James 5:7.

Fruit is the last thing to form on a tree. The Father God, the great husbandman, has been patiently waiting for nearly six thousand years since Adam and almost two thousand years since His precious son sowed His life as the first seed of the harvest. It's God's plan that every saint be fully equipped to assist in gathering in the harvest of souls that He has so patiently waited for. It's the responsibility of the Ascension ministries to see that saints are fully equipped for the task of gathering in the harvest.

“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, (for the common good of all), dividing to every man severally as he will”. 1Cor 12:7.

“For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word **and deed**, Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”. Rom 15:18-19.

Let love be your greatest aim; nevertheless, ask also for the special abilities the Holy Spirit gives, and especially the gift of prophecy, being able to preach the messages of God. But if your gift is that of being able to "speak in tongues," that is, to speak in languages you haven't learned, you will be talking to God but not to others, since they won't be able to understand you. You will be speaking by the power of the Spirit, but it will all be a secret. But he who prophesies, preaching the messages of God, is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them. 1 Cor 14:1-3 (TLB).

For ye may all prophesy one by one that all may learn, and all may be comforted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 1Cor 14:31-32.

THE FINAL SOLUTION IS TO MEET UNDER THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

Whose headship are you meeting under? Whose headship should you be meeting under? Do we need to pay a man, who's been appointed by an institution, and under their umbrella, to run our spiritual lives? Hebrews 12:15. Paul tells us we are to watch out for one another. In the multitude of counselors there is safety and wisdom. Outside of the local "ecclesia", what authority over the church is there? What makes one man in the midst more qualified than all the saints assembled? Who gave this man, or group of men, greater authority than that given to the whole local assembly under the headship of Christ? Who gave them their authority to do such a thing? We are not saying that there is no necessity for oversight, but, please don't say to me that he's given to us for our protection, he's got just as many problems as his flock, and sometimes more. There have been scores of preachers, with credentials issued by some ecclesiastical organization, who ran away with his secretary, or an elder's wife. You might as well put your name on a sausage roll as put it on a church roll, for all the protection it will give you. There is far less oversight under institutionalized and organized religion, than among a body of caring saints, functioning as Christ intended? It is what's in the heart that matters. It is what comes out of a man, not how many credentials he carries in his pocket. The doctrine of human covering is designed to make saints docile and submissive. It's just another subtle form of spiritual bondage.

It is obvious from scriptures that the word 'church' is not the word we should use, but 'ecclesia', which means 'the called out ones', but everyday practice is too difficult to break. In Revelation we are called to come out of 'her'. The religious system is a like Jezebel, who was not submissive to her husband!

If indeed we are hearing the Holy Spirit say 'come out of her' then we need to obey. The question then arises; do we have to join something? We are already joined to Christ, and are "in Christ", what more is necessary? Jesus said, 'Come unto me', 'Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be'. All the practices of church denominations are founded on Law, and not the law of the spirit of life in Christ, but the Laws of their movement. Another way to look at it would be to call their laws, "traditions". Jesus faced the same problem 2,000 years ago when He warned the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees.

Then the question arises, how do we gather together, and how do we organize a 'meeting' or exercise discipline, or receive tithes and offerings etc.? We freely admit, that we who have been caught up in the religious system, find it difficult to deal with such questions, and find ourselves struggling for answers. Habits die-hard and are not willing to go voluntarily, but instead, more questions keep poking up their heads. Thus, we who would 'come out' also bring with us certain practices and attitudes, not forgetting that we also find 'comfort' and 'security' when we have someone to dot every 'i' and cross every 't', so that we know where we are going; that is, from the natural sense of things.

I admit it is a problem, because we have been so thoroughly conditioned by the old order. And no man having drunk old wine straightaway desires the new said Jesus. The temptation is to make some changes just to be different to what we formerly practiced. It's so easy to fall back into the old systems and securities of the carnal mind until it becomes clear to our understanding that initially, we have come out of the world. Then it also becomes clear, that we came out, 'to come to Christ'. Hebrews 12:22-29 tells us what else we are come to, and apart from these things, there is nothing else to come to. The scriptures are plain on this fact. We assemble under His headship and do nothing to formalize another structured system. Just come together in someone's home, as you feel led. Whoever is the head of that house is responsible for the natural setting of that particular gathering. This is what

the Holy Spirit has come to do. In the multitude of counselors there is safety and wisdom when we are under the headship of Christ, and the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Every member of our natural body is under one head, so too is the body of Christ. It is obvious that people living in different locations, were called by the name of that location, such as the church at Ephesus, the church at Pergamos, etc. etc. So the groupings of saints were identified by the locality in which they lived. Thus they gathered under the one headship, that of Jesus Christ. Where in that location did they gather? In homes as recorded in Acts 2:46. They spontaneously responded to the Spirit of God. Forget the Temple, as they were Jews who still had to break with that system. However, it wasn't long before the Lord dealt with that particular problem by destroying it, thus removing the legal bondage.

Soon Paul and Barnabas were planting churches among the Gentiles in Galatia, which had no affinity with the temple, or Jewish synagogues. There were no synagogues in Rome, because there were no Jews there. Emperor Claudius banished them all. There were none in Philippi for the same reason. Paul literally scoured the city, and could find neither Jew nor synagogue. The first Christians in Rome met in homes. You didn't advertise that you were a believer there, unless you wanted Nero to throw you to the lions in the Coliseum. Many Jews were converted, and came to Christ throughout the Empire, but like all believers in many places, they had to meet in secret because of persecution. This persecution came not only from the Romans, but also from Christ rejecting Jews.

When you begin to think these things through, this whole notion we have that you can't have church without a building, is false. Meeting in buildings was totally foreign to the first century church gatherings. It wasn't until the so-called conversion of Constantine that persecution ceased and buildings for gatherings became established, a black day for the church to be sure. Yet some have the impudence to demand that we must only worship in the designated place, one that's been authorized by the clergy. It is certain that people gathered to hear Paul preach and teach, and wherever a man with a message from God appeared, the people gathered to hear him.

With regard to children, let us encourage them to participate as much as possible in the fellowship, to share in the spirit of the meeting; if some are unable because of tiredness, or age, then let us again be considerate to others. That means parents should make every effort not to disturb anyone else, when caring for their children. It's not someone else's responsibility; it's for them to take care of, and as much as possible, see to it that their family is under control and ordered aright. The thing we do not want to do is to deny the children their place to learn the things that pertain to the Lord's kingdom.

Offerings present little difficulty, if there are no buildings to maintain, or pastors to support. With no advertising and no rents, it makes life a little easier and also takes from the saints the burdens that are associated with building programs. Most of the money extracted by institutions goes for overheads like salaries, rent, or loan payments and a percentage to head office first. Then, if there's anything left over (and there rarely is), they pass it on to missions, maybe. Scriptures tell us to know them that minister among you, in other words, be a good steward. Looking at the situation in the New Testament, we find that Paul exhorted the saints in the letters to the Corinthians, to lay aside for the saints. It is obvious, from reading these Scriptures that this was special relief for the saints in Jerusalem who were living under famine conditions. **And they were a year in putting it together!** Have you ever wondered why? It's because much of it came out of the annual harvest, which was then sold for money.

It is apparent there was no constraint upon the people. Paul wrote that you gave what you have, not what you didn't have. 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Corinthians 9:7. There is **no mention of tithes** in these passages. Strange isn't it? If we meet in our houses then there are no costs incurred. What if numbers increase? Then the number of houses will increase so that solves that problem!

Scriptures tell us to care for the widow and the fatherless, and these are they who are widows indeed, not just parasites. What we are here talking of are those who have no headship. The widow has no husband, the fatherless a father; we need to oversee them, not by constraint, but by the spirit of love to help them in their particular need or distress. That brings us to the different functions in the body of Christ. We function according to the calling or gifting of the Lord. Not by trying to prove by our activity that we have something of which others need to take note.

Elders are what the term implies. They didn't suddenly appear for the first time in the New Testament. They were always a part of the life of Israel. They sat in the gates and saw to it that everyone was having their needs met. They are not some exclusive group having secret meetings behind closed doors, to plan programs. Neither are they rigid rulers running the show. They are just older members of a family taking responsibility, to see that nobody is neglected while others are having their needs met, **both spiritual and temporal**. The people should put them forward. The saints know better than anyone does who they can trust and who they can't.

The people are happiest when they are able to have respect, and confidence in the men they have chosen; true elders that have proven themselves.

Each member of the body has a function and a part to play. They should be permitted to operate and indeed, assisted to do so. Those who do have a ministry, gifting are to be accepted as such in the body, recognition coming as a result of being proven by grace and not by force or striving. A man's gifting makes room for him. Again, it is by the Spirit of Christ, which Spirit is meek, gentle, easy to be entreated, kind, long-suffering etc.

There will always be certain men, who, spying out your liberty, will try to come and take control. Be vigilant and discerning, and don't be frightened to sit them down. If they have a controlling spirit, and they can't get what they want, they will soon leave. But don't let that stop you gathering. Get together with those of like mind in homes. The four cardinal activities of New Testament Christianity are fellowship, breaking of bread, the apostle's doctrine, and prayer. Recognize that Christ has some special servants in the body for feeding His people, but don't let them take over. Let the teachers teach, let the musicians make music, let the exhorters exhort, and let those who prophesy do so, not allowing any one individual to dominate a gathering. Always remember, that everything we do has one end in view, and that's to edify and build each other up in the Lord.

A LIST OF BOOKS THAT ARE AVAILABLE.

THE LORD'S SUPPER. "Do this in remembrance of Me." and keep doing it till I come. This most powerful book is a must for every lover of Christ.

THY KINGDOM COME.

This book will revolutionize the way you look at Christianity.

DUMBING DOWN THE SAINTS. This is an intriguing in-depth look at the pulpit from the pew. This is a must for all discerning saints.

THE COUNTERFEIT CHURCH. A close look at some things we practice that have no scriptural foundation, but are no more than traditions and customs.

THE REFORMATION 1600 YEARS BEFORE MARTIN LUTHER'S.

We can't live under two Covenants

LIVING IN THE SURPLUS. Is for those who want to become debt free and have a surplus to use for God's glory. Nothing is more depressing, than continued financial pressure. You can become financially free it's not a myth it's God's will.

PROPHETS PROPHECY AND THE PROPHETIC. looks into the roll of Prophets and the place of prophetic leading and guidance.

TO THE CHURCH IN AUCKLAND WRITE. By Ray Miller.

Personal insights into today's Church scene.

RESTORATION SERIES. By Donald Dunn.

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