

Defining Church

Its Biblical Function and Activity

Most people today understand “church” to mean the brick building down the street with a lofty steeple on top. But the word church is a common misnomer. It hardly captures the meaning of its Greek counterpart *ekklesia*, simply translated as “**the assembly of called-out ones.**” The building in which Christians meet is only a gathering spot and completely irrelevant to the existence of the actual Church. The true Church is made up of individuals who have accepted Jesus as Lord of their lives and faithfully follow His teachings.

Yet today’s “church” has greatly evolved from the original movement kindled by Christ and carried forward by His disciples. Many customs and traditions have crept in over the last two millennia that were never espoused by the first century Church, nor by the Apostles who founded it. Sadly, these are now considered normative practice even though they are foreign to the apostolic creed and far removed from their recorded teachings. So this leaves us to question much of what we have come to call “church” and whether it truly squares with God’s Word.

The following study will attempt to unravel the real definition of “ekklesia” and what the Scriptures teach us about its true function and activity. In pursuing this essential subject it is our desire to understand how the early Church would have assembled together and what *they* would have considered normal practice. It is my hope that if our current model is invalidated by our findings that we would not continue to perpetuate the false notion of “church” and its many baseless rituals merely on account of tradition.

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

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In Romans 16:5, Paul refers to the church as a body of Believers meeting in someone’s house, “... greet the church that is in their house.” It is clear, then, that we are the Church—not the building.

The Church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head. Ephesians 1:22-23 says, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2) until Christ's return. The body of Christ is comprised of two aspects:

1) The universal church, which consists of all those who have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). This verse says that anyone who believes is part of the body of Christ and has received the Spirit of Christ as evidence. The universal church of God is all those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

2) The local church, which is described in Galatians 1:1-2: "Paul, an apostle ... and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia." Here we see that in the province of Galatia there were many churches—what we call local churches. A Baptist church, Lutheran church, Catholic church, etc., does **not** necessarily represent the true church. The universal church is comprised of those who belong to Christ and who have trusted in Him for salvation. The members of the universal church should seek fellowship and edification in a local congregation or fellowship.

In summary, the church is not a building or a denomination. According to the Bible, the church is the body of Christ—all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Local churches are gatherings of members of the universal church. The local church is where the members of the universal church can fully apply the "body" principles of 1 Corinthians chapter 12: encouraging, teaching, and building one another up in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. **That is why we are exhorted to meet together regularly:** *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching* (Heb 10:25).

TRUTH OR TRADITION?

Borrowed from Pagan Christianity (in blue)

Why do Christians do what they do for church every Sunday—have you ever wondered? Why do we "dress up"? Why do we have sacred buildings to meet in, pulpits, sacramental tables, clergy, liturgies, etc? It may surprise you to learn that most of what Christians do in present-day churches is rooted, not in the New Testament, but in pagan culture and rituals developed long after the death of the apostles. As you reconsider Christ's revolutionary plan for His Church—to be the head of a fully functioning body in which all believers play an active role— and as you examine many...

of the historical facts surrounding our popular church traditions, you'll be challenged to decide whether you can ever do church the same way again.

The Building

Prior to 324 AD, there was no such thing as a church building. Christians simply met in houses or worshiped in public places such as the Jewish temple (Act 2:46). And in most instances, persecution necessitated that they meet underground like in the catacombs for fear of being discovered. So what brought about the change and how did the church building come to exist? The transition from home gathering to the “brick and mortar edifice” dates back to the period of Roman history under Constantine the Great.

Emperor Constantine is often lauded for recognizing Christianity as the legal religion of the Roman Empire (313 AD) and granting Christians freedom to worship. But what many fail to realize is that Constantine made a decisive and yet strategic action by converting Rome to Christianity. The well known motto, “if you can’t beat them, join them”, was coined by the emperor himself and was a technique he used to subvert Christianity and corrupt it with paganism, the religion of that era. In so doing, Constantine prevented paganism from dying out completely in the centuries to come.

Yet how exactly did Constantine go about seeding Christianity with paganism? History tells us that one of his most successful methods was to convert all of the existing pagan temples into “holy spaces” for Christian worship. The “church” building was thus created, and as a consequence, Christianity lost its “organic” quality and began to operate much like an institution.

Today, Christians must ask the following questions. Where did the early Church gather for worship and fellowship? Does the church building create the same atmosphere as the one engendered by first century Christians? And finally, what is at stake if we continue to employ the same pagan model adopted centuries ago?

Let’s begin by addressing the question of location. The Bible provides ample evidence that the early Church did in fact meet together almost exclusively in houses:

*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 (Act 2:46).*

And when he had considered the thing, he came to **the house** of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; **where many were gathered together praying** (Act 12:12).

Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ (Rom 16:5).

The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, **with the church that is in their house** (1Co 16:19).

Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, **and the church which is in his house** (Col 4:15).

And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, **and to the church in thy house** (Phm 1:2).

As we can see, Christianity started off rather simple and early Believers considered their homes to be the most suitable location for gatherings and regular fellowship. But what about our second question? Can we really be confident that “church buildings” foster the same atmosphere as the one at home? I don’t believe so; here’s why. Firstly, the intention of Christ in founding His Church was to create a Body of Believers **that functioned much the same way as a family**. The order found in the New Testament pertaining to Church membership involves God the Father (Mat 5:16), His Son Jesus our elder Brother (Rom 8:29), and all the rest of us His brethren (Mat 23:8). What does this tell us? It speaks of the fact that Christ did not come to create a formal religion like the thousands already in existence. **Secondly, the church building promotes the atmosphere of a business organization more than it does the living organism that Christ’s Body was created to be**. In relation to this assertion, allow me to point out several important facts for your consideration:

1) Overhead Expense

We can’t deny the enormous overhead involved in maintaining a church building. Just consider the cost of acoustic equipment, furnishings, upgrades, expansions, and regular maintenance. Not to mention the annual renovations inside and around the building (repaving the parking lot, etc). Then of course there’s **the salary of an academically accredited “pastor”**, which members are expected to finance so that...

he can oversee every spiritual function of the “church program”. And lastly, we can’t dodge the fact that because of all the money invested in this big “corporate effort”, the clergy and members are pressured heavily to deliver gratifying results, even if they are self-created and counterfeited. So is this really very practical? And is it worth all the hard earned money lost in doing church this way??

Note: Dare I point out that the millions of dollars invested every year into these “sacred” church superstructures could have been donated to poor people around the world.

2) Formal Fellowship

The simplicity of the first century Church is in stark contrast to the formality of its modern day counterpart. Take for example the custom of dressing up for church every Sunday. This clearly does nothing to glorify God, and neither is it taught *anywhere* in the entire New Testament. In fact, it only serves to further enhance the air of formality. Then there’s also the hustle and bustle of crowded meetings typical of most churches today, which has many members bemoaning the lack of intimate fellowship between congregants. Here again is just another example of total loss in terms of meaningful spiritual interaction.

3) Programmed Meetings

Most of us have grown weary of the same scheduled meetings that drag on from Sunday to Sunday, week after week with very little variance. We hardly regard the Spirit’s agenda and have created our own format by timing our meetings down to the last minute, and we wonder why God’s no longer in it.

Practical Objections to House Meetings

Having covered the negative points associated with the “church” building, are there any practical objections that can be raised to house meetings? Well, there are plenty of people who would seem to think so. I believe the most frequent objection raised has to do with space. Church buildings are intentionally built large and roomy in order to accommodate as many congregants as possible. This poses a serious problem to home gatherings which are forced to function with far less space. Unless, that is, we make some modifications to our preexisting suppositions on how a typical church must operate. Then also, if we look at the model that is being implemented by persecuted Christians around the world, we will find that they have grown accustomed to house

churches simply because they are not able to meet in the open for fear of death or imprisonment. Just take China for example. It has a thriving underground Church numbering in the many millions, yet they are all part of the house Church network. So how do they make it work? How are they able to gather in homes having so many more congregants to support than the church averages present in the free Western world? How these house Churches operate is proposed in the following:

1) Distribution of Members between Homes

When the hosting capacity has reached its maximum in one house, members will simply redistribute themselves to meet in someone else's home. This way no single member's house is overwhelmed by too many congregants. Also, this allows the Church to strategically spread and multiply across the city, town, or village, to eventually occupy all regions of the country, which is the best form of exponential growth!

2) Delegation of Authority

As house Churches spread, so does the authority responsible for oversight. This means that members are constantly appointing new individuals to positions of leadership. So how does this impact the greater Body? The impact is rather profound when realizing just how many godly leaders are being created all the time and given responsibilities pertaining to the ministry. This in itself is the greatest attestation of success! Furthermore, and most importantly, it reduces the potential for any one leader to monopolize God's people.

Please Note: While advocating for the above principles, we are not suggesting that Churches must meet exclusively in houses, or that all meetings within a large building are wrong. Sometimes exceptions may apply, and we must be lead by the Spirit as to when and how they are appropriated.

Denominationalism

Denominationalism is a big problem in traditional churches and has created rifts in the Body of Christ since its earliest existence. Christ's Church was always intended to be a single entity and was never meant to fracture on the basis of denominational lines (Jn 17:22). Many Christians have resorted to splitting with other Christians on account of doctrinal differences, and yet this is normal and can be expected. What seems to be entirely against the Spirit's work is when we erect tall fences to keep all outsiders out unless they conform completely to our particular creed and doctrinal leanings. This is

what various denominations have done by giving themselves a name and structuralizing their beliefs around their individual institutions. This has been the single most obvious indication that the Church has truly become carnal:

*Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; **are ye not carnal?** (1Co 1:12-13; 3:4).*

Seminaries & Bible College

Those who seek to enter ministry should avoid going through a seminary or Bible college to do so. We are unable to provide any biblical examples or instruction to justify this now common practice. It is true that universities have their place in secular business life and are needed in today's world in order to gain entrance into certain professions. But suffice it to say, no one can qualify an individual for Church service based on their graduate status or academic degree. The scriptural requirements for ministry as found in Acts 6:3-6 involve **good character, spiritual anointing, and prior experience serving the Body.** **Serving the Body of Christ is not a job description that offers financial compensation or requires a job interview and a resume listing one's education history and credentials.** How far down the track do we really want to meander in making the Church a finely tuned business organization? I hope we take the time to ponder this question.

Titles of Honor

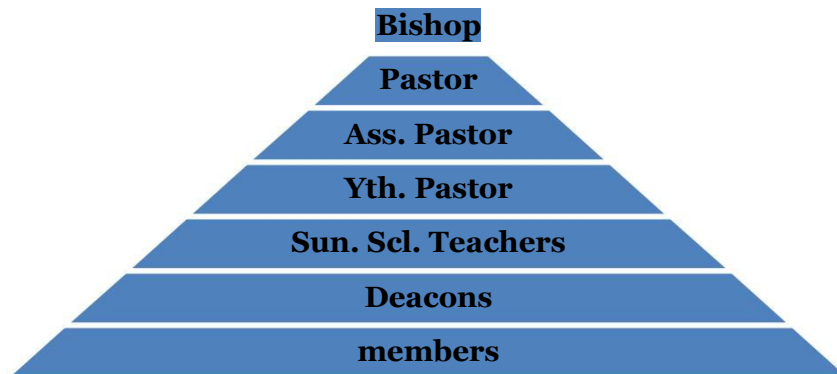
*And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, **and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi:** for one is your Master, even Christ; **and all ye are brethren.** And **call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ***

(Mat 23:6-10).

Many pastors today use their seminary degree as a badge of spiritual authority and a token of anointed leadership. Having paid a hefty sum of money to some theological institution to obtain their credentials, they consider themselves qualified for "work" in the ministry. But is this really what qualifies men for spiritual roles of authority? No, not at all! These men are deceived into thinking that spiritual status is

gained through academic means. But make no mistake; this practice is highly unbiblical and goes contrary to the teachings of Scripture. The only way to gain spiritual rapport in the Body of Christ is by practicing humble servitude and becoming an able minister to the needs of God’s people (1 Tim 3:1-15; Tit 1:5-9). Sadly, these men insist on racking up status the worldly way, and many of them are professional businessmen who are keen on profit and monetary gain. They are “**hirelings**”, not true Shepherds (Jn 10:12-13). No doubt, they savor their titles of honor such as, doctor, pastor, professor, etc, much the same way the Pharisees did (Jn 12:43). But Jesus warned about the use of titles in the Church, and we should take extra caution to avoid these things diligently.

False Church Hierarchy



It is sad that many churches today practice a model of authority that is hierarchical, political, and completely unbiblical in nature. But Christ’s Body is made up of servants. The Greek word for servant is *diakonos*, from whence we derive our English equivalent, “deacon”. Some servants are older and some younger, but all are servants. Those who are older and have served the Body well, are given the task of oversight, and are worthy of greater respect (1 Tim 5:1, 17). The older category of servants, also known as elders, is the one we will examine more closely in this study.

The New Testament uses two Greek words to represent the English word for elder. These words are as follows, *presbuteros* and *episkopoi*. The 1940 *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* by W.E. Vine, along with the *Strong’s*, define these Greek words in the following manner:

PRESBUTEROS: “an adjective, the comparative degree of *presbus*, an old man, an elder, is used of age, whether of the elder of two persons, Luke 15:25; or of a person advanced in life, a senior, Acts 2:17...”

EPISKOPOI: “or overseer, is applied to the work of a *presbus*, to their spiritual maturity or experience, 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 5:17, and Titus 1:5....”

Apparently, the biblical elder is an old man of spiritual maturity who has been given the duty of overseer in the Assembly. But if the elder is the overseer, is he the only one qualified to oversee the Church? Good question. The intense confusion over this matter is the result of too many interchangeable titles all pointing to the same office of Pastor. In other words, the elder is the equivalent of the “**bishop**”, **father**, **pastor**, **overseer**, and **shepherd**. In fact, his position is the same as, or synonymous with all the others. Allow me to demonstrate this:

1. Acts 20:17, 18, 28: *And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church...And when they were come to him, he said unto them..... Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, **over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.***

It is obvious that the elders in Ephesus were charged with “feeding the flock” (the church of God), which is the work of a shepherd or pastor (Latin for shepherd).

2. 1 Peter 5:1-5: *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: **Feed the flock of God** which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the **chief Shepherd** shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. **Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.** Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

3. 1 Peter 2:25: *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the **Shepherd and Bishop** of your souls.*

Clearly, the elders in Asia were instructed to care for God’s flock and to “take the oversight thereof”, which describes the work of the bishops/overseers. Also, notice how the title “Chief Shepherd” (v. 4) referring to Jesus Christ is used as a comparative for their office. Finally, verse 5 demonstrates how the service of an overseer is held by an old man or a man of physical seniority—an elder.

So now that we’ve proven that all of these titles are actually interchangeable, we are left to conclude that only an elder is truly qualified to lead the Church—no one else. But the second principle we must establish is what sort of elder is most qualified for the task of spiritual oversight. Obviously, not every old man will make a good leader. For this reason, the Bible gives some precise instructions when it comes to the qualifications of an elder. Let’s have a look:

*This is a true saying, If a man desire to serve as a bishop, he desireth a good work. A **bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the service of a deacon, being found blameless** (1 Tim 3:1-10).*

*For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders** in every city, as I had appointed thee: **If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers** (Tit 1:5-9).*

The above passages make it abundantly clear that a Church elder must be an older man with the following spiritual qualities: **(a) immaculate character, (b) good reputation, (c) exemplary family, (d) capable teacher of the Word, and (e) servant of all.** Any who wish to pursue such a call better have all of these attributes present before attempting to assert their “position” in the Assembly. In other words, this is not a role to be taken lightly. Also, it greatly reduces the options for who can serve as a leader over God’s people, **legitimately.**

But there are many today who pursue positions of authority merely out of selfish ambition, or because they are power hungry and love preeminence. And if God’s people don’t want to be duped by these phony leaders, they **must** test **all of them** and make them accountable to the qualifications located in 1 Timothy and Titus. If we fail to do so and end up with a corrupt or abusive form of leadership, **we** are to blame for this and no one else.

Now the best safeguard against abusive leaders is to be intimately familiar with the Scriptures. Since there are certain passages that can be twisted to control Church members, it is wise to study them so we can understand their intended meaning. This will prevent us from becoming easy “prey”. Notice:

*Remember them which **have the rule over you**, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. **Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you** (Hebrews 13:7; 17).*

So what do these verses mean? They mean exactly what they say! When we have located the proper elders who are qualified to lead us by **their example and way of life**, we should most certainly submit to them. We should allow them to give us qualified spiritual guidance. And we should heed their council and instruction. It is that simple.

Another important distinction to recognize in the above passages is the form of authority described therein. It is not compulsory, but rather exemplary. To better understand the differences between compulsory and exemplary leadership we will refer to 1 Peter 5:

*The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; **Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.** And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble (1 Pet 5:1-5).*

The elders are expressly commanded not to “Lord it over God’s inheritance”. This simply means that they are not permitted to micromanage our life and monopolize our activities. Unfortunately, there are many out there who do exactly that, and there are many foolish individuals who willingly submit to them anyway.

Summed up, the authority of the church elder it is the difference between **hierarchy** and **patriarchy**, **positional** and **experiential**, **tyrannical** and **exemplary** (1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:5-9, 1 Pet 5:1-5, 2 Cor 1:24). These qualities are key to choosing the right spiritual leader and making sure their authority doesn’t cross the line of what is proper.

Now the other important fact to which I will draw our attention pertains to the plurality of elders in the early Church. According to the Bible, every Church is required to have several qualified elders to oversee it, not just one:

Acts 14:23: *And when they had ordained them **elders** (plural) in every **church** (singular), and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

James 5:14: *Is any sick among you? let him call for the **elders** (plural) of the **church** (singular); and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*

Proverbs 11:14: *...**but in the multitude of counsellors** there is safety.*

Q. & A. on the Matter of Elders

Question: How do we know how old an elder ought to be and does it really matter?

Answer: The guideline of age is very important only because it is a good indication of experience and wisdom—both of which derive from age. According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, an elder must be old enough to have fathered children who by their conduct and behavior attest to their father’s parenting aptitude. Obviously, the behavior of really young children is not the best measure of parental success. Additionally, we have many verses that distinguish between an elder and young man, which seems to suggest that an elder should be at least old enough to have children of marriage age or a little younger. Notice:

*The **elders** which are among you I exhort... **Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.** Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility... (1 Pet 5:5).*

Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity (1 Tim 5:1-2).

Clearly, the terms “younger” and “younger men”, mentioned here, are not intended to be measured against an elder by four, five, or even ten years in difference. Otherwise, we would have some pretty young fathers running around. Hence the young men commanded to submit to the elders, as unto their fathers, are not merely younger by three or four years (plus or minus). The relationship between elders and young men is at the level of father and son.

Paul and Peter were Jews. They were familiar with the Jewish customs and traditions of their day. As such, they were very much inclined to follow the religious order of the Sanhedrin and Elders in electing elderly individuals for the position of authority in the Assembly. It is also a very natural standard of authority. An individual will naturally take to the authority of an older man rather than that of a young man. **Imagine an Assembly in which a group of ten elderly men had to appeal to a 28 or 30 year old pastor “as unto a father” (1 Tim 5:1). You would think such an**

order of authority was completely absurd. Yet this is exactly what is happening today. The biblical authority roles are being inverted wholesale!!

Finally, since the qualifications for both elder and deacon are the same, the only clear difference between the two is that of age. The elder is older and ordained to lead the Church, while the deacon is younger and ordained to serve in a different capacity.

Question: Weren't Timothy and Titus appointed as elders?

Answer: Nowhere in the Pauline letters are Timothy and Titus given the titles of elder or pastor, and neither was Paul for that matter. However, it is evident from their assignments that they were evangelists or church planters. They were there to help organize the Church and facilitate order. And they did this by appointing elders in Paul's authority.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH

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A Call to Order

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul begins to instruct the Corinthian church about their somewhat disorganized worship services. As we studied previously, he says that women should wear a head covering when they pray and prophesy; then he corrects the Corinthians on the way they had been observing the Lord's Supper. In chapter 12, he addresses the proper use of spiritual gifts in the worship service. He describes a number of gifts, and insists that all gifts are important to the Body of Christ; the variety of gifts calls for mutual respect and honor, not vanity or shame.

In chapter 13, he describes character (i.e. Love) as the focus of our spiritual pursuit, and in chapter 14 he makes an extended contrast between the gift of tongues and the gift of prophesying. Apparently some people in Corinth were extolling the gift of tongues as a mark of superior spirituality. Paul did not tell them to stop speaking in tongues, but he did put some restrictions on how tongues should be used in the worship service:

- 1) There should be two or three speakers (14:27).

- 2) They should speak one at a time (v. 27).

3) There should be an interpretation (v. 27b). If no one can interpret the tongues, “the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God” (v. 28).

However, this requirement should not be lifted out of its context to create **a complete prohibition on the person ever speaking, singing or praying**. Paul is apparently trying to give some organization to what had been a rather chaotic worship meeting— several people speaking at once, speaking words that no one could understand.

Paul recommends the gift of prophecy as a far more helpful gift, but he gives similar guidelines for those speakers, too:

1) Only two or three should speak (v. 29). If someone else has something to say, the first speaker should be quiet.

2) They should speak one at a time (v. 31).

3) People should “weigh carefully what is said” (v. 29; cf. 1 Thess. 5:21).

Paul notes that “the spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets” (1 Cor. 14:32). That is, the speakers are able to stop; they cannot use “God made me do it” as an excuse for adding to the commotion. When God gives a gift, he also gives the person the responsibility to make decisions to use that gift in an appropriate way. Simply having the gift is not an excuse to use it whenever and wherever the person wants to. Paul explains his reason: “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” (v. 33).

Paul then tells the women to be **quiet**, and to ask their questions at home: “As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent (quiet/under control) in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church” (vv. 33-35).

Let’s examine some of the details in these verses.

Observations

1) The first thing we notice is that women are not the only people Paul tells to be “silent.”

He uses the same word in verses 28 and 30 to tell tongue-speakers and prophets to be silent when others speak. In both of those verses, he is calling for a temporary silence, not a complete and permanent prohibition.

2) The word for “speak” (laleō) does not necessarily mean a formal role in the pulpit—it is a general word that can also be translated “talk.” Paul used a general word to say that women should not talk, and we have to make an interpretive choice: Was he prohibiting disruptive talk (talk in the audience), argumentative challenges, or all utterance?

3) Paul says that instead of speaking, women should be in submission. This implies that the Corinthian women were speaking in an insubordinate way. **Perhaps they were asking questions and then challenging the answers? Maybe they were making a disruptive commotion and detracting from the sermon?** The fact that Paul said in chapter 11 that women could pray and prophesy (**prophecy being a public utterance addressed to a group of people**), and in chapter 14 that two or three people could prophesy in a worship service, shows that women are allowed to have a slot in the speaking schedule. It is not insubordinate for them to speak prophecies; it is therefore likely that Paul is prohibiting some less-formal speaking, such as chatter or comments from the audience, and of course, **insubordinate challenges and arguing.**

4) Paul says that “the Law” requires submission (Gen 3:16). And this indicates that women should submit to their husbands or their spiritual authorities, not challenge them publicly. When Paul says that it is “disgraceful” for women to talk in church, his choice of words appeal to a certain sense of propriety. He forbids the type of “talk” that is disruptive or insubordinate. Blomberg suggests, “Perhaps the largely uneducated women of that day were interrupting proceedings with irrelevant questions that would be better dealt with in their homes.” Belleville says, “Their fault was not in the asking per se but in the inappropriate setting for their questions.”

So what does this teach us? If we take the instruction located in 1 Corinthians 14 literally, then women must never sing, pray, or prophecy in Church. But this would not compute well with the rest of Scripture (1 Co 11:5). However, if we look at a similar

teaching located in 1 Timothy 2, then we may understand what Paul is really asking of women:

*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection (**not raising arguments**). But I suffer not a woman **to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man**, but to be in silence (**quiet/undisruptive**). For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression (1 Tim 2:11-14).*

Paul's main problem here has to do with women stepping out of line. It has to do with insubordinate behavior in the Church. Hence his focus is on submission ("with all subjection"). **It also has to do with women not assuming the role of authority in the Church, such as teaching or preaching. We can't possibly claim that women teaching or preaching, which are roles of authority and leadership, are legitimized anywhere in the New Testament.** Paul's concise instructions clearly disprove of it. Conversely, we are creating an impossible prohibition the moment we expect women to keep completely mute during the Church service. I believe that it is well within the bounds of Scripture for women to prophecy, pray, and even share a testimony during a Church meeting. But it is not right for them to preach or teach, maintain authority, and they should never be disruptive [men shouldn't either].

Note: According to Paul's teachings, a wife should take any questions of doctrine to her husband instead of asking them publicly at Church (1 Cor 14:35).

COMMUNION

Borrowed from an online source (in blue)

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again ([1 Corinthians 11:24-26](#)).

As we come to the Communion table, there are three things we should remember, according to [1 Corinthians 11:23-30](#). First, we should look back. We are to participate in Communion in remembrance of Christ (see verse 24). Though we must be reverent and must be appreciative of what Communion symbolizes, Communion also speaks of

intimacy and fellowship. And so we look back. We look back to the cross. We remember what Christ accomplished for us. And we are reminded of His love for us.

Second, we are to look ahead. The Scriptures say to do this "until he comes again" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The first time Jesus came to this earth, He came as the Suffering Servant. The next time, He will come as the Conquering King. Communion is an observance to remind us that Jesus will come again.

Third, Communion is a time to look within. We are to look within and ask the Holy Spirit to show us any areas of our lives that may not be pleasing to God (see verse 28). Once we acknowledge these areas, we are to repent of these sins. To fail to do so and then to take part in Communion is to eat and drink damnation to yourself, as the King James Version renders it. Or, it is to eat and drink, "not honoring the body of Christ" (verse 29).

So come to the Communion table in joy. Come in reverence. Come in honesty. If there is something that isn't right, this is the time to deal with it. Communion is an ideal time to make a commitment or recommitment to Jesus Christ.

The Communion Meal (1 Corinthians 11)

According to 1 Corinthians 11:26, the frequency of communion is up to us. It should not be regulated ritualistically or otherwise. However, it does appear that the early Church observed the Lord's Supper frequently (verses 17, 20, 33), or whenever Believers came together "as a church" (verse 18). Moreover, in Luke 22:20 we discover that the disciples partook of the sacraments (bread and wine) sometime after their supper together. Paul seems to support this practice when advising the Corinthians to satisfy their hunger at home (11:34), but then to "come together to eat" the Lord's Supper (verse 33).

In my opinion, it is better to hold communion often in order to remember Christ's atonement and finished sacrifice. This also encourages us to examine ourselves regularly as to whether or not we are worthy of partaking in the holy communion of the Saints.

Note: Because leaven symbolizes sin (Mat 16:6; Luk 12:1; 1 Cor 5:6-8; Gal 5:9), the Passover should always be kept with unleavened bread (1 Cor 5:6-8). Jesus was our perfect Passover lamb and He was without blemish (sin). The Communion meal is a memorial of this fact: *Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a*

new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Co 5:6-8).

So then if we memorialize Communion in a symbolic manner, it is important to remain as consistent as possible and true to the biblical pattern by preparing the Communion bread with unleavened meal. This will also enable us to explain the symbolic meaning of Communion to our children or the unbeliever. We will be able to show them that Christ our Passover lamb was unblemished and without sin/leaven when partaking of the unleavened bread of Communion.

“Closed Communion”

The term closed Communion refers to the practice of restricting certain members of the Church from participating in the Lord’s Supper. To explain it simply, Communion should never be offered to a member of the Body known or suspected to be living in sin. By our willingness to offer the sacraments to an unrepentant sinner, we are compromising their safety, which is not a loving action: *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep* (1 Cor 11:29-30).

FEET WASHING

Borrowed from an online source (in blue)

In Bible times, the dusty and dirty conditions of the region and the wearing of sandals necessitated foot-washing. Although the disciples most likely would have been happy to wash Jesus' feet, they could not conceive of washing each other's feet. This was because in the society of the time, foot-washing was reserved for the lowliest of menial servants. Peers did not wash one another's feet, except very rarely and as a mark of great love. Luke points out (22:24) that the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them, an attitude that precludes a willingness to stoop to wash feet. When Jesus moved to wash their feet (see also John 13:1-16), they were shocked. His actions serve also as symbolic of spiritual cleansing (vs. 6-9) and a model of Christian humility (vs. 12-17). By washing His disciples’ feet, Jesus taught the lesson of selfless service that was supremely exemplified by His death on the cross.

The foot-washing was an example, a pattern of servitude. Many groups throughout church history have practiced literal foot-washing as a church ordinance. However, present culture in many lands does not call for washing dust from the feet of one's guests. Although the Lord's Supper was practiced, many throughout church history apparently did not practice foot-washing as an ordinance in church gatherings.

This passage emphasizes inner humility, not a physical rite. A Christian widow's practice of "washing the feet of the saints" (1 Timothy 5:10) speaks not of her involvement in a church ordinance but of her humble, slave-like service to other believers. To refuse to follow the example of Jesus is to exalt oneself above Him and to live in pride. "No servant is greater than his master" (John 12:26).

Today, the feet washing of the Saints is a matter of choice. If the assemblies choose to practice this command in a literal manner, they are free to do so as long as they are also willing to carry out the practical servitude to which it points. As a personal note, I have always found feet washing with fellow Brethren to be an enriching and unifying experience and intend to continue practicing it with others who have also. **If for no other reason, it's an excellent reminder of how important it is to serve each other and maintain Christ-like humility.**

THE "HOLY KISS"

Greet one another with a holy kiss...Greet one another with a holy kiss... Greet one another with a holy kiss... Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss... Greet one another with the kiss of love (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thes 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14).

The Jewish culture of Bible times was often openly affectionate and emotional in their display of love. We can find many examples of this throughout the recorded text. However, it doesn't seem that the Gentile Believers or Jews of the Diaspora were very keen to follow suit. As a result, the Apostles often had to exhort the Believers to greet each other with a "holy kiss" in order to encourage this type of obvious endearment. Since then, and for many centuries after, the Church has been practicing this emblem of love in compliance with the biblical injunction. Even today among the Anabaptists and Russian Pentecostals it is still an expected practice. Yet most evangelicals have long abandoned the holy kiss and have swapped it for the more formal handshake or pat on the back. While this is sad, it is also a very strong indicator of the waning atmosphere of

love present in many Churches. It is a sign that we are growing much more formal and far less intimate in our interaction.

Yet having said this, we must take extra caution not to give the wrong impression to any outsiders, who may be unaware of our intentions. Otherwise, we should endeavor to obey this clear command of Scripture and to display more meaningful affection one with another as a token of our genuine love for the Body.

Note: It is a custom of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures to greet family and friends with a kiss on the cheek. This has been our own preferred method as it does not give the appearance of sexual misconduct.

Also, it is inappropriate for unmarried members of the opposite sex to practice any form of close physical contact, including the holy kiss, as this would violate the clear prohibition located in 1 Corinthians 7:1.

FEAR OF GOD IN THE ASSEMBLY

*And Ananias hearing these words **fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things** (Act 5:5; 11).*

The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is a stark reminder of the concentrated presence of the Holy Spirit in the first century Church. When the couple attempted to deceive the Apostles concerning the sale of their land, they were immediately informed that they had lied, not to man, but to the Spirit, and promptly dropped dead. This account then circulated among the Believers and great fear fell upon the Church as a consequence. It was this very fear that also caused many to repent of their sin and to realize that God was not to be trifled with, especially by those who were practicing their faith with insincerity.

But what can we learn from this account today? And why have we no fear of God anymore? While the answer is uncomfortable, it's also rather obvious. Clearly, we have resorted to playing make-believe church and have no interest in authentic Christianity—**the kind involving sacrifice and suffering**. We just want the fuzzy, emotional feelings that we contrive from our fraudulent gatherings. And as a result, the presence of God is no longer with us, and neither is the fear of God. And in the absence of the fear of God, which was indicative of the early Church, the alternative atmosphere is one that

is casual, lukewarm, and even *playful*. Many of us are walking in blatant sin seemingly impervious to the consequences, and neither do we mind it at all that we have lost touch with the fearful presence of the living God.

COMMUNAL LIVING AND THE COMMON PURSE

There are Churches today that practice communal living and the common purse as a matter of Scriptural command. They will usually point to Acts 2 and 4, and the example of the early Church as justification for their beliefs. But could it be that Acts 2 and 4 are taken out of context and that the Bible actually teaches otherwise? Let's find out by examining the following passages:

*And all that believed were together, and **had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.** And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: **neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common** (Act 2:44-45; 4:32).*

If read carefully, the above verses fail to prove that the early Church put their money into a “common purse”, or that they forfeited personal stewardship of property in favor of shared possessions. What we do find is that the need present, i.e., the poor in the Church, necessitated a sacrificial act of giving by those who were able—the wealthy. And in order to give in accordance with the need, those who could, sold their excess possessions and distributed the proceeds among the poor. **No one in the Church had the attitude that because they owned something, they weren't going to share it with others. They realized that everything that they owned ultimately belonged to God, and was not intrinsically theirs. Therefore they were willing to share as the need arose.**

In line with our explanation so far, there are many scriptures throughout the New Testament that support the idea of personal stewardship. Notice:

Every man *according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).*

Let him that stole steal no more: **but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth** (Eph 4:28).

But by **an equality**, that now at this time **your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality** (2 Cor 8:14).

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. **Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him**, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor 16:1-2).

Clearly, the above verses prove that the early Church was expected to have full stewardship over their own finances. Yet besides what we've already demonstrated, there are many other biblical examples where the apostles were not only given personal stewardship of money, but were also in possession of their own homes and property (Mark 10:30; Act 2:46; 1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:4-5; Philemon 2; Col 4:15). So what does this tell us? Simply that the teaching of communal living and the common purse are not supported in the Holy Word.

Special Note: There is a type of community lifestyle that will be necessary during the coming tribulation period because of the cashless society even now emerging. Yet this "living together" will not necessarily require a common purse or the joint ownership of all property. It will, however, involve a sharing of goods and caring for each member of the Body as we seek to find ways to survive the changing climate of a devolving world.

EX-COMMUNICATION

Borrowed from an online source (in blue)

What does the Bible teach about ex-communication? Church discipline is the process of correcting sinful behavior among members of a local church body for the purpose of protecting the church, restoring the sinner to a right walk with God, and renewing fellowship among the church members. In some cases, church discipline can proceed all the way to excommunication, which is the formal removal of an individual from church membership and the informal separation from that individual.

Matthew 18:15–20 gives the procedure and authority for a church to practice church discipline. Jesus instructs us that one individual (usually the offended party) is to go to the offending individual privately. If the offender refuses to acknowledge his sin and repent, then two or three others go to confirm the details of the situation. If there is still no repentance—the offender remains firmly attached to his sin, despite two chances to repent—the matter is taken before the church. The offender then has a third chance to repent and forsake his sinful behavior. If at any point in the process of church discipline, the sinner heeds the call to repent, then “you have gained your brother” (verse 15, ESV). However, if the discipline continues all the way through the third step without a positive response from the offender, then, Jesus said, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (verse 17, ESV).

The process of church discipline is never pleasant just as a father never delights in having to discipline his children. Sometimes, though, church discipline is necessary. The purpose of church discipline is not to be mean-spirited or to display a holier-than-thou attitude. Rather, the goal of church discipline is the restoration of the individual to full fellowship with both God and other believers. The discipline is to start privately and gradually become more public. It is to be done in love toward the individual, in obedience to God, and in godly fear for the sake of others in the church.

The Bible’s instructions concerning church discipline imply the necessity of a member’s participation in a local assembly. The church and its pastor are responsible for the spiritual well-being of a certain group of people (members of the local church), not of everyone in the city. In the context of church discipline, Paul asks, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?” (1 Corinthians 5:12). The candidate for church discipline has to be “inside” the church and accountable to the church. He professes faith in Christ yet continues in undeniable sin.

The Bible gives an example of church discipline in a local church—the church of Corinth (1 Corinthians 5:1–13). In this case, the discipline led to excommunication, and the apostle Paul gives some reasons for the discipline. One is that sin is like yeast; if allowed to exist, it spreads to those nearby in the same way that “a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough” (1 Corinthians 5:6–7). Also, Paul explains that Jesus saved us so that we might be set apart from sin, that we might be “unleavened” or free from that which causes spiritual decay (1 Corinthians 5:7–8). Christ’s desire for His bride, the

church, is that she might be pure and undefiled (Ephesians 5:25–27). The testimony of Christ Jesus (and His church) before unbelievers is important, too. When David sinned with Bathsheba, one of the consequences of his sin was that the name of the one true God was blasphemed by God’s enemies (2 Samuel 12:14).

Hopefully, any disciplinary action a church takes against a member is successful in bringing about godly sorrow and true repentance. When repentance occurs, the individual can be restored to fellowship. The man involved in the 1 Corinthians 5 passage repented, and Paul later encouraged the church to restore him to full fellowship with the church (2 Corinthians 2:5–8). Unfortunately, disciplinary action, even when done correctly and in love, is not always successful in bringing about restoration. Even when church discipline fails to bring about repentance, it is still needed to accomplish other good purposes such as maintaining a good testimony in the world.

We have all likely witnessed the behavior of a youngster who is always allowed to do as he pleases with no consistent discipline. It is not a pretty sight. Nor is the overly permissive parent truly loving, for a lack of guidance dooms the child to a dismal future. Undisciplined, out-of-control behavior will keep the child from forming meaningful relationships and performing well in any kind of setting. Similarly, discipline in the church, while never enjoyable or easy, is necessary at times. In fact, it is loving. And it is commanded by God.

OPEN PARTICIPATION

“Open participation” refers to the practice in which all Church members are allowed to partake in public roles of ministry. It is the opposite of the formal Church service where only the clergy are permitted to address the congregants from behind the pulpit. Most often we find open participation in smaller gatherings that meet informally in houses as opposed to large “church” buildings. These types of meetings, as demonstrated thus far, were a staple of all New Testament Congregations throughout the Apostolic period. The best example where such proceedings are described is located in 1 Corinthians 14:26, *How is it then, brethren? **when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.***

When reading 1 Corinthians 14, we find that Paul was clearly encouraging all members of the Church to participate in its ministry functions. However, despite this clear teaching, there are many Churches today that refuse to practice any form of open participation with “lay people”. This is very sad, and to be openly candid, it may be stated that if a Church is devoid of open participation, it is bound to become a **formalistic and dead substitute** for what Jesus Christ intended for His Body. Such churches are in danger of having to give account to God one day for why they have chosen to repress His people’s unique gifting and contribution to the Church, Christ’s Body.

REIMAGINING CHURCH

In this final section, we will try to envision what a “normal” New Testament Church would look like if it were practicing the reality found and described within Scripture. But before we do, let’s have a look at a traditional church setting. In this way, we can compare the two and make some wise observations.

Culturally Relevant Church

Borrowed from an online source (in blue)

“Dressed in their Sunday best, the members of the church made their way down to the building with the sign out front that read, ‘First Church of Christ’. The usher by the door was ready with a broad smile and a handful of bulletins containing the sermon topic for the day, ‘How To Overcome Anxiety in a Frenzied World’, and the name of the class that would meet later that evening, ‘Divorce Recovery’. Everyone filed in, sat down in neat rows, eyes forward, and waited for the choir director to start the service. They sang three songs, sang another song, passed the offering plate, and listened to a choir ‘special’. Then the ‘pastor’, looking resplendent in a shiny blue, three-piece suit, with a really great silk tie, took to the pulpit and delivered a comforting, somewhat humorous, thirty-minute sermon. Everyone felt good about what they had heard and complimented the dear man on what a splendid job he had done, and then they all went to lunch.

Pastor Joe was relieved that no one was uncomfortable with what he had said and felt sure that most of them would return the following week. And in the satisfaction of a job well done, he soon forgot about the whole thing and began to think about something really important, his golf game (his putting had been terrible the past several weeks).”

Biblical Ekklesia

One-by-one they entered the young couple's home who had volunteered to host this week's meeting. The members greeted one another with a warm hug and a kiss on the cheek (the holy kiss). As they sat down in a circle around the living area, an elder Brother led out in prayer and slowly others joined. There was intercession and fervent prayer. The atmosphere was far from casual or relaxed. Those assembled were concerned for the salvation of lost individuals, such as family members and loved ones, and prayed deeply into their redemption.

Last week, the service opened with a lengthy time of worship and singing, but this week the Lord was moving them to pray through some deep issues that had developed more recently.

After the prayer had concluded, a number of testimonies were shared. Then a young sister stood up to deliver a prophetic message. No, not the kind we call "preaching". This was a word from the Lord directed to the Assembly in respect to the compelling need of the hour.

Sometime later a Brother was moved to speak a "word of wisdom" and the godly council shared was well received by everyone. Then after a stirring sermon delivered by one of the members, the service concluded with more prayer.

No one was concerned about the length of time or the exact format implemented, as this was a matter of the Spirit's leading, not their own. They really wanted to be fed by the Lord and to leave satisfied and full of joy.

A few times during the meeting, young mothers left the room to tend to their youngest children. The older children present enjoyed the meeting along with their peers, and were permitted to contribute like everyone else.

When the meeting was over, everyone gathered to share an afternoon lunch. Last week the meeting lasted several hours. And the week prior, they spent the entire day fasting and praying corporately.

After lunch, it was decided they would partake of the Lord's Supper, but they weren't sure whether communion would take place again next week.

The congregation had done this many times and was content to partake in whatever spiritual function the Lord was leading them into. He was their Master, and they were just happy to enjoy each other's fellowship in the bond of unity and love.

Note: The members in this example are not content to meet only once a week as described, but rather multiple times throughout the week with regular, but varied frequency.

Now granted, perhaps this example might seem unattainable or a bit idealistic; maybe even uncomfortable compared to what you are used to. And that's fine. But please consider another example located in Acts 20. Consider the fact that on a particular occasion Apostle Paul was led by the Spirit to preach to a group of congregants until midnight. This resulted in a certain young man falling asleep on a window ledge and toppling to his death (Act 20:7-11). Yet Paul was not hindered by this. He simply prayed over the young man, raised him from the dead, and then proceeded to take up a dialogue with a cluster of men well into daybreak (v.11). But you see, while we may be unaccustomed to that kind of meeting, that is precisely the way the early Church operated. They weren't regulating meetings according to a timed schedule like we do nowadays. It was simply up to the Spirit's leading, not man's.

Now to further compare the two examples, you may have already noticed that the first involved a timed format, one that was quite formal, predictable, and programmed. Also, the pastor was the main person "running the show", and apart from the singing, the members were little more than spectators. The atmosphere was casual and relaxed, everyone knew exactly how things would unfold and there was very little variance between meetings.

So isn't it far better to be part of a Church that is free from the usual humdrum and those meaningless rituals? You see, if we follow the example of the New Testament Church then we are bound to witness a **spontaneous, and yes, even supernatural movement of the Holy Spirit in our meetings.**

CHURCH REVIVAL

The greatest revivals in history have transpired when godly men and women chose to throw off formalistic constraints in order to invite God to move in a fresh and more meaningful way. When comparing the traditional style of “doing” church as opposed to the simple and uncluttered house fellowship method, we find the former to be much more clinical in its process. It shouldn’t surprise us then that with such a “sterile” environment revival is greatly hampered and God is unable to move beyond our pre-established proxies of scheduled activity and tidy programs.

CLOSING

I realize that many of you may be thinking that what I’ve presented thus far is a novel “fairytale”. You may be thinking that I’m being far too impractical to suggest that such a gathering could even be possible. But friends, I assure you that I’ve witnessed several assemblies gather in this manner and practice all of what was described. I’ve experienced the supernatural presence of the Spirit when men and women decide to gather for the glory of God and to abandon carnal tradition. And I’ve personally observed the amazing function of the spiritual gifts when the Holy Spirit was allowed to move unrestricted.

You see, if we are willing to confront the reality that our traditional way of church is a pagan substitute for what we find in Scripture, and if we want to really be “doing Church” the Bible way, then we better be ready to modify our approach. Yes, not just a wee little bit, but dramatically. We need to be willing to “throw out the old wineskins” so that new wine can be poured into “new wine skins” (Mark 2:22). I hope this teaching encourages all of us to seek the real and living way over the “preferred method” of our day.

In Christ alone,
John A.