

# **The Disciple Driven Church**

## **Finishing the Reformation**

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Steve Martin – A true hero of the faith. Your presence in my life has been an anchor. You model the qualities of a true servant of God. I am thankful to have you as a brother in Christ.

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### **Dedication**

To my wife Suzette – Always supporting and encouraging me. You are the greatest joy God has given me. Without you I would not...

To my kids – My full quiver. You never gave up on me.

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## **Introduction**

“Currently, the church in America, evangelical as well as liberal, is in trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

These words are a quote from a book titled “*Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*” first published in 1992. This book has become the handbook for the Church Planting Movement of the last few decades in America. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* offers a solution to the decline in the American church. It relies heavily on the theories put forth by the modern Church Growth Movement. The problem the church in America faces today is not new. The problem has not come upon us suddenly. Church leaders have not been caught by surprise. The problem of declining church attendance in America has been known for many years. The promise of the Church Growth and Church Planting Movements is one of a revival that will sweep across America. Aubrey Malphurs, the author writes “We are only at the very beginning of a groundswell that is about to sweep across America in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the last few decades the church in America has entered into a steep decline. There is a decline in attendance that increases with each passing generation. There is a decline in giving that increases with each passing generation. The Church Growth and Church Planting Movements claimed to have the answer to stop such declines. They proclaimed that by applying new techniques and by utilizing methods and formulas, we

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<sup>1</sup> Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Page 28

<sup>2</sup> Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Page 29

could turn the faltering church in America around. After nearly four decades of Church Growth theory, and over two decades of the Church Planting Movement, the success of these practices can be seen in our churches today. There is a decline in doctrinal aptitude and it has reached a state where the behavior of those in the church is statistically indistinguishable from those outside the church.

In this same book, the author Aubrey Malphurs also writes, “These are dark and difficult days for the church, and a big part of the problem is the fact that many churches still aren’t even aware that they are in trouble! They’re like the proverbial ostrich with its head buried in the sand – completely oblivious to what is taking place all around, yet dangerously exposed.”<sup>3</sup> What Malphurs wrote to preceding generations now applies to those that have followed the Church Growth, Seeker Sensitive, and Church Planting Movements of the last few decades. As thousands of churches close their doors and large segments of the population stop attending church altogether, the churches that have drawn a crowd are convinced they have the answer. The indicator of numerical growth has blinded them to the real spiritual crisis facing the church in America today.

How has the church in America reached such a cataclysmic state of decline? What has caused this lack of transformational effect to take hold of the church? The Christian church began as a loosely organized, illegal, unstructured, Holy Spirit empowered group of social outcasts, that transformed the known world. Two thousand years later, we find a well oiled, highly structured, mainstream organization, which once stood at

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<sup>3</sup> Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Page 28

the center of political power, and we are losing our impact on society. The church has gone from a movement that required the total commitment of its members to the point of death, to one that literally begs for anyone to enter its doors. The society we are sent to transform is morally deteriorating before our eyes. It appears, in America, that the church is being transformed by the culture. Our enemy appears to be gaining ground on all sides as the church looks for the greatest “new technique” to change its course.

This work seeks to examine how we got to this place. I will attempt to pinpoint some spots along the path where we veered off course. I will examine the things that have crept in over time. Together we will seek the source of those diversions and determine which of them declare God’s glory and which display man’s desires, intellect and control. In the end I will take us back to our roots. We will look at the basic instructions again with fresh eyes. We must re-examine how we do things. We must cling to that which is good and discard that which has diverted us from being the expression of God’s glory that He created us to be.

It is always hard to challenge the religious practices of the day. People are invested in their traditions; this is nothing new. Jesus encountered this when He preached the kingdom was at hand. He was not rejected by the religious leaders of His day because His doctrine was proven wrong, but rather because He challenged the way they did things. Jesus challenged their traditions of the Sabbath in Mark 3. Jesus challenged their traditions of church discipline in John 8. Jesus ultimately challenged their security, which was placed in the temple, as He proclaimed its coming destruction. People are often more dedicated to their practices than they are to their theology. Are you dedicated to your practices or your theology? When I use scripture to challenge the way you

do things, how will you respond? Will you dismiss it and rationalize your traditions? Will you examine it and open your heart and eyes to the possibility that the church has let many practices creep in that have caused it to lose its transformational power? Jesus confronted the people of His day and challenged their traditions. Many of them were unable to see past their traditions to recognize the words of God that were being spoken to them. As a result, they missed the Messiah they had been longing to see. Don't let traditions blind you as they did many of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

The situation is not hopeless in America but it is dire. We are at a pivotal point in church history. God has positioned us in this place in time to be a part of what can be one of the greatest moves of the Holy Spirit since He founded the church on the day of Pentecost. I believe God is about to finish the reformation He began in the days of Martin Luther. The beginning of the reformation of the church was one of theological reform. Finishing the reformation of the church will require us to reform our practices. It is time to rediscover the organic and transformational character of the church. It is up to us to choose how we participate in finishing the reformation of the church. We can dismiss the evidence and continue to hold fast to our traditions, or we can test them in light of Scripture and hold fast to only those practices that we find supported there. The choice is ours. It is time to throw off the things that hinder us.

If we expect to see a change we will need to get back to the roots of our faith. We will need to examine the way it was intended to be and compare that to how it is today. We will need to rediscover the basics. I believe we can rediscover the vibrant transformational power of God as we rediscover the church and begin to live the theology we already profess to believe.



## **Chapter 1: A Historical View of Changing Church Practices**

Jesus walked with the disciples and taught them about the Kingdom of Heaven. After he ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to teach them and lead them as He built the church under the New Covenant. The New Testament does not give us a description of exactly how the church should operate. It does contain many examples of what the early church did. The New Covenant does not contain the same detailed requirements of liturgy, temple service, and ritual that the Old Covenant contained. Instead, we see instruction on what to do, and not as much detail on how to do it. Often we find the writings of the New Testament dealing with principles of practice and correcting from a negative reinforcement. One example would be 2 Corinthians 6:14 where the Apostle Paul instructs us not to be bound together with unbelievers.

The early church clearly started out as a Holy Spirit led organism that operated on principles and reflected the very nature of God. The methods and practice of the church have become more defined over the years. This has led to many disagreements throughout history regarding church practice. Many denominations were formed due to disagreements over church practices that were then formed into church doctrine. Over time the structure over the church increased and man took a role of defining what was acceptable. As man made rules, disagreements over those rules erupted into division. The majority of division centered on practices that are not clearly defined in Scripture. We even find division in the things that are supposed to unite us as Christians. Christians have divided over spiritual gifts, baptism, communion, and some very disputable doctrinal issues.

Since its inception, seeds of division have been sown throughout the church.

Are these things really meant to be the foundations of division? Should we separate over the things that make us uniquely Christian? While we have been defining and dividing over these issues, another problem has appeared. The enemy has sown practices and traditions into the church that have weakened the church. What was once the mystical habitation of the Holy Spirit, filled with the transformational power of God, a living organic display of miracles and power, has now largely become, especially in America, a faint copy that resembles a Broadway show. The moving and indwelling of the Holy Spirit was the only way to form the church that God founded on the Day of Pentecost. Today we have created a form of church that can be duplicated, produced, packaged, financed, and launched without the Holy Spirit!

We teach the method in “boot camps” as if it came from God. We hire those that can fill the roles. We target our audience like a business studies demographics. We design our service to appeal to a specific group of people. We center our messages on the felt needs of our target group. We use the things of the world to bring relevance to our message. We find connecting points with the people that usually revolve around something of the world that has gained popularity. We have been sold the idea that this method works. It is clear from recent statistics that it does not work.

Through all this we still divide over the way we baptize or who can serve or take communion. All the while, the mystical, organic, Holy Spirit empowered organism that still exists in remnants around the world has its legitimacy questioned. We have traded in what only God can do for a system that man can duplicate. In the process we have blurred the line of what the church is

supposed to be and have given Satan opportunity to imitate it.

Many false religions have become experts at “doing church” the way it’s done in America. This is how I know it can be done without the Holy Spirit. Many religions that deny the deity of Jesus Christ have set up churches that greatly resemble the most highly recognized orthodox churches in America. When the world looks at what is presented, it sees such similarity on the surface that the uniqueness of the Gospel gets lost. It is our own fault that so many people today believe that all religions can lead us to heaven.

How did we get here? Where did we go off the path? We will begin our examination by looking at several key turning points in the history of the church. We will examine the effects that each of these had on the fundamental operations of the church. We will specifically look at the way they effected the leadership, worship, sacraments, money, and use of spiritual gifts. We will examine the origins of the things that crept in. We will also examine the principles of Scripture to see if the new methods increase or decreased the power of these principles.

### **The Edict of Milan and the Peace of the Church – Rapid Identity Change**

The first major change in church history that we will examine is the Edict of Milan. The Edict of Milan was granted by Emperors of the Roman Empire, Constantine the Great in the West, and Licinius Augustus in the East, in 313AD. It granted religious freedom throughout the Roman Empire. In addition, the Edict of Milan ordered the restitution of property confiscated from Christians. Prior to the Edict of Milan the Christian movement was illegal. The church had suffered much

persecution under the likes of Nero, Decius, and Diocletian. Living in a state of persecution gave the early church some very unique characteristics. Its style was a product of its illegal status.

The early church met primarily in homes and in many areas it met in secret. There was not a uniform level of persecution throughout Rome so there was very little uniformity in the styles or methods of each gathering. Some areas had heavy persecution while others enjoyed relative safety. The early church met where it could and operated according to the teaching principles that had been handed down to it by the Apostles.

The government did not accept Christianity until the 4th century when the Roman Emperor Constantine declared the Christian church legal. The style of the church changed to accommodate its status. This would pave the way for Theodosius the Great to declare Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD. This change in the legal status of the church had immediate effects. The most significant was that it was now legal to be Christian. The government became supportive of the religion and Constantine made great efforts to validate Christianity in the society. The church took a new place in the center of society. In 314 AD. the cathedral at Tyre was dedicated. This was the earliest instance of a Christian church building being dedicated.<sup>4</sup> Constantine erected several large basilicas including The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Old St. Peter's Basilica. The church became led by an organization that owned property and it now hired clergy. The clergy enjoyed a tax-exempt status and their jurisdiction was

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<sup>4</sup> John, Bowden. *A Chronology of World Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Print. Page 38

parallel to that of the state.<sup>5</sup> Constantine formed councils to define doctrine. The church quickly gained an operating structure that more closely resembled pagan rituals<sup>6</sup> than the structure for leadership outlined in Scripture.

Some of the long-term effects took years to develop. Under its new leadership structure the church became a political power that could be more easily controlled. The mainstream of the church changed from the underground, illegal movement it once was. There was no longer any threat to one's life for being a part of the church. The church service that was once open only to believers was now open to everyone. Non-believers began to mix with believers in the worship gathering. This lowered the requirement for becoming a disciple. What was once an organic, Spirit-led, illegal church had quickly become a legal, structured, professionally led institution. This led to the formalization and standardization of much of the worship service and function of the church. In effect the visible expression of the church changed greatly over a short time. It changed from an organic movement of Spirit-filled people to an organization designed to control doctrine, leadership, and practice. It also set the stage for another great move of man, the combining of church and state.

### **The Coronation of Charlemagne – The Age of Conquest**

After the Edict of Milan, we can trace throughout history the closer and closer ties between church and

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<sup>5</sup> John, Bowden. *A Chronology of World Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Print. Page 39

<sup>6</sup> Viola, Frank, and George Barna. *Pagan Christianity*. 2nd ed. Tyndale House Publishers, 2008. Print. Pg.52

state. The Roman Empire was ruled from Constantinople and was commonly referred to as the Byzantine Empire. In 799, Pope Leo III had been mistreated by a group of Romans, who tried to put out his eyes and tear out his tongue for accusations of adultery and perjury. Leo escaped and fled to the King of the Franks, Charlemagne at Paderborn, asking him to intervene in Rome and restore him. Charlemagne, advised by Alcuin of York, agreed to travel to Rome, doing so in November 800 and holding a council on December 1 of that year. On December 23 of 800, Pope Leo III swore an oath of innocence and his opponents were exiled. At Mass on Christmas Day, when Charlemagne knelt at the altar to pray, Pope Leo III crowned him *Imperator Romanorum* ("Emperor of the Romans") in Saint Peter's Basilica. In doing so, Pope Leo III was effectively transferring the office of Emperor from Constantinople to Charlemagne.

The effects of this action were dramatic. Eventually Charlemagne made the papacy subordinate to the emperor.<sup>7</sup> Charlemagne had a history of launching military campaigns and using forced conversion as a tool to control defeated societies. The use of forced conversions added many to the church that were not true followers of the faith. Many were slaughtered for refusing to convert.<sup>8</sup> He used the sword to reinforce the power of the Roman Catholic Church. Under Charlemagne the church had truly turned from liberator to oppressor.

Many consider him to be the first Holy Roman Emperor, though it's never recorded that he used the title

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<sup>7</sup> Dowley, Dr. Tim. *Eerdman's Handbook to The History of Christianity*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1985. Print. Pg. 229

<sup>8</sup> John, Bowden. *A Chronology of World Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 2007. Print. Pgs. 117-121

for himself. He revived learning and music in the church. He stabilized the leadership of the church and the Roman Empire, which set the stage for the Middle Ages. Under Charlemagne the church took a course that many today look back on as a very dark time in church history. Power and conquest motivated the actions and practices of the church run by the emperor. Corruption permeated the leadership of the church. Offices were handed out based on family ties and political favors. The church amassed great wealth and land holdings during the middle ages. The church leadership was ruling primarily through fear and economic power. Doctrines that promoted and bolstered the power of the leadership became accepted. Methods of fundraising that brought the ire of many theologians were adopted.

The church controlled the availability of Scriptures under the auspice of protecting doctrine. The church withheld certain aspects of the Sacraments such as withholding the communion cup from all laity. Only official church leadership was allowed to baptize. This was not outlined in Scripture or observed as a requirement of the early church. During this time the structure and leadership took control of every aspect of church life. What was once an organic movement of the Holy Spirit was now a structure of rules and regulations that could only be participated in through the official structure of the church.

### **The Reformation of Theology**

By the middle of the second century the effects of the Edict of Milan and of the coronation of Charlemagne were fully seen. The Roman Church ruled with great authority. The leadership had become corrupt. The society was based in agriculture and the church owned much of the land. It was common for powerful offices in the

church to be sold or given to relatives. The church was selling indulgences as a way for members to avoid the punishment for sin or even to get a dead relative into heaven. The office of the Pope had extreme power.

In 1517 Martin Luther opposed many of these practices and decided to call for reform of the church. He wrote his rebuttal to church practices, commonly referred to as the ninety-five theses. This document outlines ninety-five points of contention with Catholic Church doctrine and practice. I have included four main points, by their number of appearance in the thesis, that I have deemed relevant to this discussion.

6 - The pope cannot remit any guilt, except by declaring that it has been remitted by God and by assenting to God's remission; though, to be sure, he may grant remission in cases reserved to his judgment. If his right to grant remission in such cases were despised, the guilt would remain entirely unforgiven.

11 - This changing of the canonical penalty to the penalty of purgatory is quite evidently one of the tares that were sown while the bishops slept.

21 - Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope's indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved;

36 - Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Luther, Martin. "DISPUTATION OF DOCTOR MARTIN LUTHER ." <http://www.sacred-texts.com>. 1517. 18 Jun 2009 <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/the9510.txt>>.



You can see that much of Martin Luther's opposition to the church was based on doctrine. He was challenging areas where he felt they had overstepped their authority. The church proclaimed it had the power to forgive sin, change the penalty for sin, and even exchange the forgiveness for money. Luther opposed this corruption in theology and the reformation was born.

Out of this initial protest to the church, Martin Luther began to formulate a doctrinal position of reform. He summarized his points in three common terms *Sola Gracia*, *Sola Fide*, and *Sola Scriptura*. These terms are translated as, by grace alone, through faith alone, and Scripture alone.

Apart from these main doctrines Martin Luther went on to write and formulate doctrines such as the priesthood of all believers, the distinction between Law and Gospel, and the doctrine of two kingdoms. Martin Luther lived during a time when men had solidified their rule over the church. Their control of doctrine was a source of their power. With a theologian of Luther's caliber and the invention of the printing press, the doctrines of men were weakened and the church was released in an apostolic movement that had not been seen for centuries. In essence, Martin Luther had launched a return of the Gospel to the people.

Luther took a strong stand on points of doctrine that he viewed as corrupted over time. When it came to the order of service and style of worship, he intentionally made very little change.<sup>10</sup> What Luther did accomplish was setting in motion a series of events that would forever change the face of the church. His disputes over the

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<sup>10</sup> Viola, Frank, and George Barna. *Pagan Christianity*. 2nd ed. Tyndale House Publishers, 2008. Print. Pg.55

nature of Christ's presence in the elements during communion could very well have caused him to become only one part of the reformation instead of its sole leader.

Early in the reformation Martin Luther and Huldrych Zwingli had a debate over the nature of communion. Both agreed that the church had corrupted the communion supper. They found common ground in their desire to return both the bread and the cup to all followers of Christ. The debate between them centered on the nature of the communion host. Martin Luther took an adamant stand that Jesus Christ was present in the communion host. Zwingli challenged his statement and asked for Biblical support. In October of 1529 the two reformers met at the castle of Philip of Hesse in Marburg. Luther stood on the word "is" claiming that it was a literal indication. When scripture proclaims that the communion host "is the body" of Christ it means it literally. Zwingli used other similar references in scripture to debate the literal interpretation. He said when Jesus says He is the vine He did not mean He became a grapevine. When Paul calls Him the rock it did not mean Jesus became a stone.  
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In the end the two highly respected theologians of the reformation divided over the meaning of the word "is." With the leadership split the reformation became multi-faceted. Many of the groups that came out of the Catholic Church as a result of Luther and Zwingli's teachings did more to change the style and structure of the church than did the reformers themselves.

Over the course of the next few centuries the power of the Catholic Church would wane in Europe. The rise of the bourgeoisie transferred the economic power

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<sup>11</sup> George, Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*. Nashville, TN.: Broadman Press, 1988. Print. Pgs. 150-154

from land ownership to trade. With reformers running rampant and the economic power of the church in decline, Christianity began a slow decline of its influence in Europe. Many of the groups that formed over the course of the next 400 years defined themselves by their doctrinal differences rather than their Scriptural similarities. The persecution of these new groups by the Catholic Church would drive them to new lands where new works would be established.<sup>12</sup> Reformation had reignited the church. Great movements of the Holy Spirit broke out. It was the period of Great Awakenings. It appeared that the church was about to break free from the yokes of men, but in the end much of what we see practiced in the church in America today still lingers from the effects of Constantine, Charlemagne, and the practices that resulted from their rule.

### **The Azusa Street Revival – A Search for the Holy Spirit**

In large part the Reformation begun by Martin Luther had challenged the doctrine of the church structure. Martin Luther's reformation work was primarily one of doctrine. There were only a few minor changes in structure regarding governance, worship, communion, and the relationship between men and the clergy. The Protestant Reformation did not change many things in regard to the nature of the church service or how the meeting of the church was handled. There were challenges that attempted to change the structures of the church. One such work was that of George Fox and the Religious Society of Friends. Largely the Protestant denominations and churches adopted structures and methods that were familiar to them from their traditions.

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<sup>12</sup> Gonzalez, Justo L.. *The Story of Christianity Volume 2*. New York: HarpersCollins Publishers, 1985. Print. Pgs. 53-60

Fox and his followers would travel about and oppose those practices. They would do this through preaching and by entering into places of worship and interrupting the services. Fox preached the idea that the Holy Spirit was the only qualifier for ministry and anyone possessing the Spirit could minister including women and children. These ideas were harshly opposed and most churches continued in their traditions. This changed in Los Angeles in the early 1900's.

The Azusa Street Revival was a historic revival meeting that took place in Los Angeles, California and was led by William J. Seymour. It began with a meeting on April 9, 1906 at a home on Bonnie Brae Street<sup>13</sup> and continued until roughly 1915. The revival was characterized by ecstatic spiritual experiences accompanied by speaking in tongues, dramatic worship services, and interracial unity. The revival is considered by historians to be the primary catalyst for the spread of Pentecostalism in the 20th century.

What happened at Azusa Street? In 1905 William J. Seymour, a 34-year-old son of former slaves, was a student of well-known Pentecostal preacher Charles Parham and an interim pastor for a small Holiness church in Houston, Texas. Seymour was invited to speak at the local church in Los Angeles. Seymour received and accepted the invitation in February of 1906, and received financial help and a blessing from Parham for his planned one-month visit.

Seymour arrived in Los Angeles on February 22, 1906, and within two days was preaching at Julia Hutchins' church at the corner of Ninth Street and Santa Fe. During his first sermon, he preached that speaking in

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<sup>13</sup> Edith Blumhofer article appeared in *The Christian Century*, (March 7, 2006, pp. 20-22.)

tongues was the first Biblical evidence of the inevitable baptism in the Holy Spirit. On the following Sunday, March 4, he returned to the church and found that Hutchins had padlocked the door. Elders of the church rejected Seymour's teaching, primarily because he had not yet experienced the blessing about which he was preaching. He was invited to stay in the home of congregation member Edward S. Lee, and he began to hold Bible studies and prayer meetings there. Seymour and his small group of new followers soon relocated to the home of Richard and Ruth Asberry, at 214 North Bonnie Brae Street.

On April 9, 1906, after five weeks of Seymour's preaching and prayer, and three days into an intended ten-day fast, Edward S. Lee spoke in tongues for the first time. At the next meeting, Seymour shared Lee's testimony and preached a sermon on Acts 2:4 and soon, six others began to speak in tongues as well. A few days later, on April 12, Seymour himself spoke in tongues for the first time, after praying all night long. The group eventually moved to a building at 312 Azusa Street.

Among first-hand accounts were reports of the blind having their sight restored, diseases cured instantly, and immigrants that spoke only in foreign languages all being spoken to in their native language by uneducated black members, who translated the languages into English by "supernatural ability."

Singing was sporadic and in *a cappella* or occasionally in tongues. There were periods of extended silence. There was prayer for the gift of tongues. There was spontaneous preaching and altar calls for salvation, sanctification and baptism of the Holy Spirit. The members of the church never took an offering, but there was a receptacle near the door for anyone that wanted to support the revival. The core membership of the Azusa Street Mission was never much more than fifty to sixty

individuals, yet hundreds and thousands of people visited or stayed temporarily over the years.

The reformation had reached to the core of church practices. Just as in other times of reformation, there were disagreements, abuses and excesses. The Holy Spirit was pouring out on His people in new and unusual ways. The reaction to Azusa Street came from the secular media and from the church. As the events unfolded at Azusa Street many of the responses focused on the activities at the meetings. Positions were drawn regarding speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit, and other physical manifestations that were taking place. As the movement subsided in California, those who attended began to move to other parts of the world. Disagreements arose regarding doctrine and practice. Some had taken what occurred at Azusa Street and began to expect the same results as normal. Some even went to foreign countries trusting that God would give them understanding of the language without prior study.

Many denominations drew hard lines on the practices that occurred at Azusa Street. What was possibly the greatest reformation of the experience of our faith had been labeled with a question mark that remains over it to this day. One thing was for sure, this changed the face of the church. The events that occurred on Azusa Street impacted the world and gave birth to one of the fastest growing church movements in history. What started as a loosely organized, unstructured, Holy Spirit empowered group of social outcasts was once again changing the world. As with all works of reformation there was opposition from the established religious system. As those who were touched by the events at Azusa Street moved out, there were arguments about doctrine and methods. Denominations formed once again based on our differences instead of our common bond in

the Holy Spirit. 100 years later we see that what started at Azusa Street is still impacting the church today.

## **Chapter 2: Current Trends**

During the last forty years in America the church has been heavily influenced by several major trends. These trends include the Church Growth Movement, the Seeker Sensitive Movement, and the Church Planting Movement. We will also examine a more loosely organized trend towards invitational and attractional ministry that influences all of these movements. The most recent trend to take center stage in America is the Missional Movement. We will examine each of these trends and look at their effects on the church.

Before we examine the trends that are currently influencing the state of the church in America we need to look at some sobering statistics that are directly linked to these trends. If we want to see the impact of these major trends in our society we must look to the statistical evidence that examines the state of the church. I am aware that statistics can be manipulated to give a wide range of results. These statistics are not included here to sway or influence a debatable topic. These statistics simply represent what the majority of church leaders in America are well aware of today. It is my position that the current trends are responsible, at least in part, for the results that these statistics indicate.

The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008 was carried out during February-November 2008 and collected answers from 54,461 respondents who were questioned in English or Spanish. The survey showed that the American population self-identifies as predominantly Christian but Americans are slowly becoming less Christian. 86% of American adults identified themselves as Christians in 1990 and only 76% did so in 2008. The historic Mainline churches and denominations have experienced the steepest declines while the non-denominational Christian identity has been



trending upward particularly since 2001. The survey indicates that the challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion. The U. S. population continues to show signs of becoming less religious, with one out of every five Americans failing to indicate a religious identity in 2008. The "Nones" (no stated religious preference, atheist, or agnostic) continue to grow, though at a much slower pace than in the 1990s, from 8.2% in 1990, to 14.1% in 2001, to 15.0% in 2008.<sup>14</sup>

Another startling statistic is the steep decline in the percentage of each successive generation that is being incorporated into a body of believers in America. The following list shows the trend that each generation is less connected to the church than the previous one.

### **Estimated Proportion of Each Generation Reached for Christ in the USA:<sup>15</sup>**

65% of those born between 1910-1945.

35% of those born between 1946-1964.

15% of those born between 1965-1976.

4% of those born between 1977-1994.

88% of all people under the age of 26 do not attend church at all!

Another startling trend comes from a look at where American churches get their funding and what they are doing with the money they receive. When we consider

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<sup>14</sup> Kosmin, Barry A.. "American Religious Identification Survey 2008." *American Religion Survey*. THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF SECULARISM IN SOCIETY AND CULTURE . March 2009 <<http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/>>.

<sup>15</sup> Thom S. Rainer, Ph.D., *LifeWay Christian Resources*, Nashville, TN, [www.RainerGroup.com](http://www.RainerGroup.com).

the current methodology of the American church we must consider if it is financially viable to continue to operate in this way. The shock does not come from the amount of money that churches have been receiving to fund their work. The shock comes from seeing the results that they have produced with their wealth. George Barna reports that in the last decade, US churches have spent \$500 *billion* on domestic expenses “with no growth to show for it.” (Average budget = \$292,790)<sup>16</sup> With this large budget to work with, we are left asking, what is the cause of church growth stagnation and decline? One figure that may help to answer the question is found at the same source. 90% of all US churches spend 89% of their budgets on two things: (1) salaries, and (2) facilities. The American church is consuming its wealth on itself.

With no growth to show from its wealth we must ask if the methodology being used is Biblical. If any question remains we must at least ask if it is good stewardship to operate in the way we see churches operate today. Barrett and Johnson calculate that it costs the US institutional church \$1,551,466 to baptize each new member it brings in!<sup>17</sup> This is an amazing figure that I think indicates the problem of relying on an institution to do what every follower of Christ is expected to do, that is make disciples. If we were truly making disciples that could make disciples, these statistics would change dramatically. One true indicator that the American church is not doing well at making disciples that can make disciples is the following statistic: it takes 85 US church members 1 year to reach 1 person for Christ (Barrett and Johnson). If there is any question about whether or not the

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<sup>16</sup>*The Barna Group of Ventura, CA. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)*

<sup>17</sup> David Barrett and Todd Johnson, *World Christian Trends* (Pasadena: Wm. Carey Library) 2001 p. 841

American church can sustain this activity it is likely found in the fact that 80% of money given to US congregations comes from people aged 55 and older.<sup>18</sup> When we take into account the steep generational decline in attendance, and the fact that in the USA, 23 million born again Christians don't go to church anymore (Barrett and Johnson), we see a financial disaster looming on the horizon for those that are dedicated to their institutional form of church.

The resources of the church have shifted their focus from their original intent, to support the poor and the work of the missionaries, to a focus that centers on appealing to those who are professing the faith. The majority of the church's resources are spent on itself. If we hope to turn the trend of decline in America we should heed the words of the Apostle Paul where he is defending his apostolic call in Galatians chapter 2:10:

“{They} only {asked} us to remember the poor--the very thing I also was eager to do.”

Throughout history the great moves of God have always returned the heart and focus of the church to the poor and the downtrodden.

### **The Church Growth Movement**

In 1961 Donald McGavran began an "Institute for Church Growth" at Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon. This organization moved to Fuller Theological Seminary, in Pasadena, California, where McGavran became the Founding Dean of Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission. His methodology was based on his experiences as a

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<sup>18</sup> *The Barna Group of Ventura, CA. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)*

missionary to India and from several books he had written. The focus of the movement was on numerical growth as an indicator of church effectiveness.

The core of Church Growth Movement contributions can be summarized as follows.

1. The Gospel spreads most contagiously, not between strangers, nor by mass evangelism, but along the lines of kinship and friendship networks of credible Christians, especially new Christians.
2. The Gospel spreads more easily to persons and peoples who are in a receptive season of their lives, and Church Growth research has discovered many indicators of likely receptive people.
3. The Gospel spreads more naturally among a people through their language, and the indigenous forms of their culture, than through alien languages or cultural forms.
4. “First Generation” groups, classes, choirs, congregations, churches, and ministries, and other new units are more productive than established old units.
5. Apostolic ministry is more effective when we target people groups than when we target political units or geographical areas.<sup>19</sup>

The Church Growth Movement centered on using social and behavioral science data to assist ministries in planting churches. It sought to use those sciences to identify factors that facilitated growth and those that hindered it. The philosophies of the Church Growth

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<sup>19</sup> Towns, Elmer L., Gary McIntosh, Paul E. Engle, and Howard Snyder. *Evaluating the church growth movement*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004. Print. pp. 8 + 9

Movement were taught initially as mission principles. It wasn't until 1972 that these principles were organized by Peter Wagner and presented to US pastors. The methodology quickly found wide acceptance in America. Many church planting efforts have utilized the methodology expressed by McGavran. Armed with the new yardstick of numerical growth as its indicator of success, the American church was reformulating its approach to ministry.

### **The Seeker Sensitive Movement**

One of the trends that developed out of the Church Growth Movement was a Seeker Sensitive approach to church. The Seeker Sensitive movement theorized that people that were normally opposed to church could be brought into a relationship with the church, and ultimately with Jesus, if the church would respond sensitively to them regarding the things that offended them about church. As a result of this thinking, many churches adopted practices that were designed to draw people into church. They used the statistical approach of the Church Growth Movement to determine what the people did not like about church. Armed with this information they made changes in the services of the church. Sermon topics were chosen based on the felt needs of the people in the church's target demographic. Progressive forms of worship style and music were incorporated into the services. Drama became widely used. Everything from rock bands to circus acts has been used in Seeker Sensitive churches to attract people to church.

As the philosophy developed we experienced more extreme variations. Ministries began to pop up that would assist the local church with participating in this new form of evangelism. A church leader could now purchase sermon series that they could preach. They

could hire consultants; bring in traveling drama troupes and worship bands. Churches started to look to the society for what interested the people. We began to see sermon series based on popular movies and TV shows. New ministries formed to help provide materials to make it easier to use movies and TV shows in the sermon. Churches began to use slick marketing campaigns and catchy slogans to draw people into the church. It was hoped by many that the new attendees would be excited about their experience at church and invite others to attend.

Many churches operating under this philosophy adopted two primary approaches to growth. The first approach is to attract people to connection events on the church property where seekers could mingle with Christians and loose their fears or inhibitions about churches and Christians in general. The second primary approach to church growth was to encourage inviting non-Christians to the church services and let the programs of the church build a connection. Many times the theology that is taught infers that we must first build a relationship with someone before we can expect to share the gospel with him or her. The basis for this thought process is contrary to clear teachings and examples from scripture. The Book of Acts tells of the apostles going into new areas and preaching the Gospel. It never speaks of the need to first build a relationship. The Scripture records that the Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit falls on people, they repent, and then they are baptized into fellowship. In 1 John 1:3 John teaches that our fellowship is in our relationship with God and Christ. This is quite the opposite from the teaching that our fellowship results in the opportunity to lead others to a relationship with God.

The Seeker Sensitive Movement has led the church in America down a perilous path. The identity of

the church as the called-out ones of God has been blurred or lost. The church has taken on a somewhat desperate appearance as they try to come up with the next great gimmick to draw in the seekers. We are now regularly seeing car shows, treasure hunts, celebrity appearances, sports team mascots, and even door prizes to get people into the church. Once we get them there we must serve them in order to keep them there. So the church adds popular coffee shops, bookstores, elaborate playgrounds, restaurants, and even exercise facilities. All of this is done with the hope that somewhere along the way the seeker will find Jesus. Many large churches have so many amenities that they begin to resemble the local mall or country club. The most common result is a church that is full of people that are attracted to what was offered to them to get them there in the first place. The programs and amenities that serve them keep them there. Transformation takes a back seat to numerical growth. All of this is now such a natural part of our American church cultures that many are offended when it is spoken of in this manner.

After over forty years of the Church Growth Movement and almost as much of the Seeker Sensitive Movement the results are in. These two approaches to ministry have not led the church to reach or transform the society where it ministers. The Church Growth Movement has been criticized for focusing more on the pragmatic aspects of church growth than on the Biblical or spiritual aspects. Peter Wagner, a church growth pioneer, has acknowledged this criticism as accurate.<sup>20</sup> As the leaders of these movements and their adherents struggle to redefine themselves, there are other movements that are

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<sup>20</sup> Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Page 27

seeking to get the church back out into the world instead of attracting or inviting the world into the church.

### **The Church Planting Movement**

The Church Planting Movement put feet to the Church Growth Principles in America.

These principles are defined as:

1. A Great Commission Vision
2. Strong Servant leadership, because a plurality of lay leaders has proved insufficient to lead the church.
3. A well equipped and mobilized lay army
4. Culturally relevant ministry
5. Holistic, authentic worship
6. Culturally relevant evangelism that focuses on the Biblical styles of evangelism other than confrontational evangelism.<sup>21</sup>

It may be difficult for some of you at first glance to recognize a problem with such a list. Surely the Great Commission should top the list. I agree! If this were taught as the responsibility of each church member then I believe this work would not be needed today and we would not be discussing such a catastrophic decline in the church. When it is held up as the responsibility of the organization and the programs of the ministry, it loses its original impact.

The second principle on the list sounds Biblical because of course we all know that Jesus was a servant leader. The problem comes when we dismiss the Biblical leadership structure that God outlines in Scripture as being insufficient to lead the church. Ephesians 4:11-13

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<sup>21</sup> Malphurs, Aubrey. *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*. 2. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Page 27



outlines a plurality of leadership gifts given to lead the church. Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus are to raise up and ordain elders to rule the church. God did not instruct us in an insufficient method of church leadership.

Numbers three through five are not precursors to church planting. These are the natural outflow of a group of dedicated disciples that gather as the church. Number six is one of the most disturbing aspects to me. The very church that God founded through confrontational evangelism is now supposed to put that on the shelf. Why? Is it because statistics show that people don't like it? What of the biblical basis and historical evidence that shows that God blesses such public proclamations of His Word! Can we for a moment consider Jonah and Ninevah? Can we examine Paul's approach to ministry or Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost? What would our history look like if our predecessors had followed this principle? Would the Great Awakenings have happened? Would Martin Luther have nailed his thesis to the door? Would the likes of St. Patrick, Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, or Jonathon Edwards even be remembered today? What prompted this exclusion from the methods? Has God laid down new instructions for us through the Church Growth and Church Planting Movement leaders or has Satan sown a tare among the wheat?

The Church Planting movement built on the Church Growth Movements' idea of using social and behavioral science data to assist church growth. In applying it to planting churches, it started with the process of assessing church planters' past experiences and personality types to determine who is likely to succeed in planting a church. The next step was to assemble a suitable team. This was followed by determining a suitable location, worship team, ministry focus, etc... The end package may look different for each church but the methodology behind each is the same. The six principles

would be applied in the predetermined manor that was deemed best suitable and attractive to the target audience. The work was programmed, packaged and presented to the world.

The Church Planting Movement appears to put the proverbial cart before the horse in its approach to growing God's church. The Bible is clear that Jesus builds the church (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:47). Our job is to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). This includes preaching the gospel, baptizing, and teaching to obey. If we would just focus on our job and stop trying to come up with a better formula for doing God's job, we might just see the revival we all long to see.

The New Testament does not describe ministry in the way the Church Planting Movement outlines its approach to ministry. In the Bible, the leadership is raised up from among the new disciples. In the Church Planting Movement, leadership is established before the church exists. It promotes and relies on hierarchical leadership structure under one lead pastor and not a plurality of leaders as outlined in scripture. In the New Testament the Christians reached into and transformed the culture. Their relevance came with their message. The need for a savior is universal to all cultures. In the New Testament, worship was described as the spontaneous result of gathering a group of transformed people who wished to express their love and gratitude for the God who made and saved them. We do not find a New Testament position of worship leader. The Church Planting Movement programs the worship as a draw to connect people with God. Many times they are trying to connect people in worship to a God they do not even recognize or acknowledge.

With promises of a "coming wave" that will sweep across America, the Church Planting Movement has not delivered. If we wish to see God build His church in America we should closely examine the ways in which

He instructs us to operate as a church. The tide has not yet turned and the church is still in trouble in America. Its time for every follower of Christ to examine themselves and take the steps needed to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

### **The Missional Movement**

The Missional Movement has taken on many definitions in a very short time. It is widely accepted that the term “Missional” refers to the concept of taking ministry out of the four walls of the church and to engage the society with the goal of sharing the gospel. Missional once had a core philosophy of engaging the society through commerce in order to connect with the people in the society. Soon, any ministry that took place outside the church, regardless of their methodology, began to use the term. The term began to apply to virtually any ministry that was focused on leaving the church walls to do ministry.

One of the unfortunate problems with the Missional Movement is that it is now taking with it many of the harmful philosophies that were solidified in the Seeker Sensitive Movement. One example is that we must do something to earn the right to share the Gospel. Missional movements have focused on engaging the society at the core of its decadence. Churches have taken over taverns and continued to operate them in order to connect with the patrons. Missional missionaries have opened businesses in some of the most depraved areas of our society. The core belief of the Missional Movement affirms our mandate to take the gospel to the people where they live. It is unfortunate that so many elements of invitation and attraction have followed the Missional Movement from the Seeker Sensitive church to the streets. One example of this is a trend in my hometown to

organize religious and political discussions at local breweries. People are encouraged to invite their friends to the brewery to engage in the discussion. The same flawed theology is at the core of this approach. It is assumed that the power of the gospel lies in our ability to build relationships with the unchurched. The only real change in this Missional approach to ministry is in the location of the event.

### **Attractional and Invitational Ministry**

These two concepts are at the foundation of the Church Growth and Seeker Sensitive Movements, and in large part, are being carried into the Missional Movement. Each of these models of ministry carries with it some very harmful effects for the church. Although these are usually not expressed outright as core values of these movements, they have become the accepted and normal operating procedure for most adherents of these philosophies. There is no indication in Scripture that either of these methods were practiced or condoned. Some may say by a stretch of rationalization that because Jesus drew large crowds with miracles that His ministry style was attractional. Let us compare the facts. I would hardly compare an iPod door prize for the youth that brings the most guests to youth group and a public display of miraculous healing. We must also take note that Jesus regularly fled from the crowds or instructed his disciples to send them away. This is hardly what we see churches doing in America today.

What are the harmful results of practicing an invitational or attractional style of ministry? The most harmful effect of this style of ministry is that it mixes a large number of non-believers in the worship gathering. This will be dealt with in detail in chapter eight. Attractional ministry by its very nature makes the church

the focus of ministry. It places all eyes on the church, its events, and its facilities. When a church engages in attractional ministry it sees the community as a means by which to grow the church. The language may not communicate this clearly but that is the result. The idea is to draw people to the church and the primary sign of success is a larger church. Instead of sending people out to make disciples, the goal is that of drawing the community in to be connected to the church and let the programs and ministries of the church disciple the people.

Invitational ministry promotes a sense that it is the job of the church as an organization to make disciples. The only responsibility of the member is to invite guests and serve in a ministry of the church. This lightens the burden of learning for the member and removes from them the personal responsibility of making disciples. Anyone who has ever taught a subject will agree that the best way to learn is to be required to teach the subject. Since we no longer require members to teach their disciples, we have in effect, removed a valuable tool for learning from the church. Recent surveys have exposed the negative effect this has had on the biblical aptitude of many church members. The majority of professing American Christian population is ignorant of the teachings of Scripture.<sup>22</sup>

Many churches are being built upon attracting or inviting people. When the needs of the people change, or another church begins to offer similar things in a more appealing way, it is not unusual to see people change churches. One of the less visible effects of these methods is the large transient church population in America. People often switch churches. Finding a new church has become so closely tied to the consumer mentality of the culture that it is even referred to as “church shopping.” I

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<sup>22</sup> *The Barna Group of Ventura, CA. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)*

understand that we live in a more mobile society than the first century society of the New Testament. Changes in our place of worship will occur more frequently as a result. What I am referring to is a process of attending and sampling multiple churches in a given area without relocating your residence.

The churches in America are so aware of this trend that a large part of church planting philosophy focuses on making a good first impression on those that are “church shopping.” There are new services popping up to help churches address this issue. There is now a secret worshipper service that is similar in some ways to the secret shopper services offered to businesses.<sup>23</sup> A secret worshipper will attend your church service and give you a detailed analysis of how you can change your church to make it more appealing to new visitors. When I see the content of Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, I can hardly picture him using this service.

Another harmful effect of these methods is the promotion of a consumer mentality regarding church. The primary outreach of the church is to offer things to the community that it finds appealing. Whoever does the best job of appealing to the community will then grow the biggest church. With the advent of the modern American Mega-church we can see the result. Many of these churches spend thousands of dollars and thousands of man-hours each week just to put on the public event. Many are trying to do the best job they can to serve God. Quite frankly they are very good at what they do. These services can be as complex and well produced as the best Broadway show. If the rationale for spending so much time and money on the service is to reach the lost and teach the Gospel, then by all means we should be seeing the fruit of that in the society by now. The sad truth is that

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.thechurchcheck.com>

we are seeing the fruit of these methods. Many of the staggering statistics I have already shared with you expose the fruit of these methods. The church in America is declining in both attendance and doctrinal aptitude.

Should consumerism be a factor in how our churches operate? When the clear call of Scripture is to deny yourself, then how can we deliver that message through consumerism? The gospel of the world is to focus on oneself. The economic system lives and dies by the consumer. Can we really use the things of the world to accomplish the things God? In the following chapters, I will explore the effects of a few more harmful practices of the modern church. We will look in detail at the practice of inviting non-Christians to the worship service. We will examine the practice of segregating the church by age and where this practice began. We will examine what happens when programs run the church. We will look specifically at what effect this has on the consecration of the individual believer and the views of the Holy Spirit and His work.

## **Chapter 3: Harmful Practices of the Modern Church**

### **Programming the Work**

Some of the most evident effects of the harmful practices of the modern American church can best be seen in the analysis of the doctrinal aptitude of church members and the behaviors of church members in society. When the church builds on the consumer appetites of the society it must completely reverse this course at some point if it is to compel its new members to pursue consecration and deny themselves. At the same time it is preaching the concept of denying oneself and pursuing holiness, it is also teaching its members to use the attractions of the world to draw in new attendees. Jesus warned that we could only serve one master, yet in practice, the modern American church attempts to serve two.

In order to present a palatable offering of attractive events for the general public to connect to, the church must schedule and program its ministry in such a way that it can fit on a calendar. One of the effects of programming ministry in this way is that it begins to resemble a job. Since the majority of the attendees are initially attracted to and retained by the church because of the offering it presented, it becomes very difficult for a church to staff all of the necessary volunteer positions required in order to offer its smorgasbord of events. This may force the church to hire out services in order to continue to offer certain events. The ministry becomes financially self-consuming. The church ends up spending the large majority of its resources putting on and staffing events that are designed to attract or retain attendees.

Programming the work turns ministry into jobs. What the Bible describes as the working of spiritual gifts



to serve and build up the body of Christ can be quickly turned into a series of management tasks and duties that resemble those found in the secular work place. No wonder it becomes increasingly difficult to find volunteers and avoid ministry burnout. With ministries resembling the workplace more and more, the church has turned to the business world for counsel on running the church. We now see many secular business philosophies being adopted by the church under the guise of good stewardship. One example of this is the use of Non-Compete clauses in the contracts for ministry positions. The real reason there is a need for secular business counsel is because our churches now resemble secular businesses. What is described in Ephesians chapter 3 as a Holy Spirit filled assembly of believers that is supposed to declare the glory of God to the spirit realm is now a collection of anyone who can be attracted to a building and have a felt need met.

Another danger inherent in using attraction and events to reach the lost is the need to focus on the felt needs of the individual. When our focus is on the felt needs of the individual, then in order to reach them more effectively, we must narrow our focus to smaller and smaller targets. If we can sharpen the focus we can appeal in a more relevant way to the individual. So what do we see the church in America rushing to do? They separate. We design ministries for singles, and married couples, and divorced, and on and on it goes. The depth of division is only left to the imagination. We separate by age, by gender, by station in life, by interest, by hobby, by the most miniscule difference in our lives. Now imagine this. The Body of Christ that is supposed to have unity in the Holy Spirit is being built up through intentional division. Ministries are designed to appeal to some targeted area of interest but in order to have unity at some point we must ask people to put aside their differences and unite around

what they have in common. What kind of effect does this have on the church? Where do we get this concept for ministry?

### **Age Segregation**

Age segregation is the easiest of these methods to examine. Age segregation creates division and weakens the family. However, age segregation has become a standard of operation in most American churches. Where did this concept begin and why has it dominated the landscape? When we look at the way in which the early church met, there is no indication that they did anything that resembles the highly organized age segregation that permeates the church today. Most people reading this have been taught that segregating by age is needed in order to teach age appropriate material. If age segregation is needed then why didn't God instruct us to do ministry this way? The truth of who is behind this method becomes clear as we discover its origins.

Plato envisioned a society where the children would be raised by the best and brightest minds available. The children would be removed from their parents and be placed with these brightest minds in society for training. This would be done in order to remove them from the influence of their parents. The philosophers and kings would take the responsibility of training the next generation for the benefit of mankind. Near the end of Book 7 of Plato's *The Republic*, we find this dialogue.

“How will they proceed? They will begin by sending out into the country all the inhabitants of the city who are more than ten years old, and will take possession of their children, who will be unaffected by the habits of their parents; these they will train in their own habits and laws, I mean in the laws which we have given them: and in this

way the State and constitution of which we were speaking will soonest and most easily attain happiness, and the nation which has such a constitution will gain most.”<sup>24</sup>

This picture of the perfect society that is found in Plato’s *The Republic* was only one man’s vision put into fiction. Something, somewhere along history’s path changed. The age of science and reason placed the focus of society on the intellect. A shift occurred. Where skill, character and family heritage were once valued by society, we saw a new standard appear. The growth of the intellect became the prime directive. A subtle shift has placed the emphasis of all learning on the growing of cognitive ability. Science sought ways to explain the ability to think and learn. We began looking for new ways to teach and new concepts to help us help others to learn.

In 1859 Charles Darwin published his book *The Origins of the Species*. This work became a catalyst for the scientific community and outlined his theory of evolution and natural selection. If this theory were true, then the implications would be far reaching. Soon science was looking at life and learning in a whole new way. A biologist name Ernst Haeckel was sympathetic to the teaching of Charles Darwin that assumed that life proceeded through an evolutionary cycle. He combined this thought with the work of Etienne Serres and applied this idea to the human reproductive cycle. Haeckel’s theory became widely known as the Recapitulation Theory. He coined the phrase “Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny” as a simple means to describe his theory. In its simplest form it suggested that the human embryo proceeded through the adult evolutionary forms in the womb. In other words the embryonic development of an

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<sup>24</sup> Plato. *The Republic* (*Πολιτεία*/"*Politeia*"). Athens: 380 B.C.. Print.

individual organism (its ontogeny) followed the same path as the evolutionary history of its species (its phylogeny).

This theory was taught as scientific fact for many years. Even science textbooks in my lifetime have used the artwork that portrays this theory even though it had been discredited by the early twentieth century. If we presume that Darwin was right about the development of life through the ages, and Haeckel was right about the development of the embryo in the womb, then what did that mean about the development outside the womb?

A famous psychologist named G. Stanley Hall took the concepts contained in some of Darwin and Haeckel's theories and applied them to child development. He theorized that there was a one-to-one correspondence between childhood stages and evolutionary history. He supposed that every child progressed through the intellectual development stages of prehistoric man as they grew. Therefore it was counterproductive to push a child ahead of its development stage. With the 1883 publication of "*The Contents of Children's Minds*," Hall established himself as the leader of the "child-study" movement. Hall's work lent scientific support to the "muscular Christian" approach to education, an intersection of morals, physical health, and economic productivity that was popular among the reformers who started the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Boy Scouts, and other character-building organizations.

Since each age of development was increasingly more capable of complex thought, then we must teach accordingly. We could not have "Cro-Magnon man" being taught the same way as "Neanderthal man." G. Stanley Hall's theory of adolescent behavior and early childhood development became the standard for the education world. Hall pursued a path that focused

primarily on developing males but his work inspired age segregation to flourish. Schools across Europe and then America adopted age segregation as the new way to teach. The rush towards age appropriate learning was on.

As the Sunday School Movement came to America it incorporated age segregation as a tool for increasing the learning level of people in the church. What was founded in the theory of evolution and the debunked theory of Recapitulation was now becoming the standard in the church. With the advent of the Church Growth Movement this new way of teaching fit well with the methodology adopted by this movement. The Seeker Sensitive Movement adopted it as a draw for the unchurched. Children's ministry was in full swing. This method of ministry is so entrenched in our American church culture that many people cannot imagine having to sit through a worship service with their own children! Instead we place them in age segregated groups so they can learn cognitively about God.

There is truth in the idea that children learn differently at different ages. This is not being disputed. The question that I want to ask is "What is being lost when we segregate by age for the purpose of learning?" Is growing the intellect supposed to take primacy over other types of learning? When we examine the generational decline in church attendance we must ask ourselves if our current methodology is producing the results that God desires. Is age segregation building up families? Is it establishing clear lines of authority in the lives of our children? Is it building up or tearing down the bonds between generations in the church and the society? Is it the best way to form character and raise the next generation? Is it even accomplishing an increase in cognitive learning? What is lost in the lives of these children that grow up in church yet fail to experience the full working of the Body of Christ?

Let's examine some of these questions. One effect of age segregation in the church is the confusion of authority in the life of the child. God designed the family to raise the child. God gives detailed instructions for His design of authority and leadership for the family. It is clear in Scripture that God's design is to have clear lines of authority and leadership.

When we segregate our children in church, we are setting someone else up as an authority in their life. We elevate the Sunday School teacher to a position of religious authority. The teacher is now the authority regarding Scripture, God, and doctrine. This is not automatically a bad thing. If the parents are working closely to disciple their children and the teacher submits to the parents in any areas of dispute over these things, then the line of authority can remain clear. However, this is rare in the function of the church. If the teacher were a servant of just one family it would be possible to avoid authority confusion.

Many modern American churches are dealing with dozens or even hundreds or thousands of kids on a Sunday morning. The teachers are not usually highly trained in theology. The ministries generally use prepackaged, mass-produced lessons that are taught to all the children of similar age. The methodology makes it nearly impossible for a teacher to address and teach any specific points of concern of the parents. Instead the teacher or curriculum developer becomes the doctrinal authority in the life of the child. When we place our children into a Sunday school setting we are communicating something very important to the child. We are effectively saying "This person will teach you about God."

Is this necessarily a bad thing? Not always but what are the effects on the child as they progress through the ages in Sunday school? They change teachers and

classes and each time their spiritual authority changes. By the time they reach their teen years many of our children have had dozens of people that were supposed to be their spiritual authorities. Upon entering their teen years, and what is commonly referred to as youth ministry, we find a large majority of volunteers and interns are college-age students or recent graduates from the youth ministry. We now place young people in authority over young people. Where do the parents now fit in the role of spiritual authority in the life of the average American teen? We have entrusted our kids to people that have been taught by the system. Is this the way God describes our responsibility to raise our children?

Many have argued that parents can make these choices to raise their kids this way without violating God's instructions to be responsible for training their children. They often focus on the things that this form of instruction gains for their children. Most of the "positives" focus on the appeal, comfort, social interaction, or age appropriate learning possibilities that come from this approach. What is rarely discussed is what is lost. When we remove the children from the other church members in this way we isolate them from the people of different ages that can model many things for them. We do not allow time for them to make connection with older members. This prevents them from building relationships that could be an anchor as they grow and move to other stages of life. One example of the negative effect of this is the trend of those raised in the church to leave the faith after going off to college.<sup>25</sup>

Let's look at the average life of an American child. In early childhood many are at home with their mothers. More often now, at a very early age, children are placed into age segregated environments in order to

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<sup>25</sup> *The Barna Group of Ventura, CA. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)*

increase learning and develop social skills. By the time a child enters preschool their week consists of more waking hours spent with those of their own age than doing anything else. Many kids will leave their homes in the early morning, ride a bus or walk to school, come home to an empty house and then go out with friends. It is likely that six days a week the child will spend four to twelve hours segregated from anyone of a different age group except for their teacher. If the child spends five days a week at school and both parents work, it is likely that they will spend fifty or more hours each week segregated by age. Add in two hours segregated by age at church and we have at least fifty-two waking hours that are spent in age segregation. As the children grow and develop friendships and gain mobility this number increases. If we assume eight hours of sleep per night and time spent grooming we can deduct at least sixty hours from the available one hundred sixty eight hours each week. With just school, church, sleep and personal care it is unlikely that an American child will spend more than twenty or thirty hours each week outside of age segregated environments. Even though they are not in regularly scheduled age segregated environments does not mean they are experiencing interaction with other age groups. When we factor in homework, TV, video games, and similar activities, it is unlikely that most American children that attend public or private schools will spend much significant time with people of other ages besides their parents.

What are the effects of this on the child and on society? I do not think society has seen the full effect of this. We have only engaged this approach for less than 100-years. When we look at how this now permeates our society we can safely say the jury is still out on the full effect. What are some trends that we can identify that may be linked to this? The most prominent is the steep decline



in those that were raised in this system that attend church as adults. The system does not produce fully committed followers of Christ, which are fully connected to a functioning body of believers out of the majority that participate in it.

Since the professed primary motivator for this system is to increase learning in the children, we can assess our effectiveness by assessing those that have been trained in this system. When the adult churching population in America is questioned on fundamental basic theology, the results of our methodology become clear. The system has failed to produce the intellectual results it was designed to produce. The adult population that regularly attends church is grossly ignorant of basic orthodox theological principles. The system has not produced the intellectual result it was designed to produce in the majority of those that participate in it.

One goal of the church is to build up the family. The question I ask is if the church in America is effective at building up the family? The answer is found when we look at the family in America. It does not take long to find a multitude of statistical data to suggest that in America, the family is in deep trouble. Over the last century the divorce rate has skyrocketed, teen pregnancy is rampant, and drugs, suicide, and domestic violence have permeated society. When we assess the character of those raised in the church by examining behaviors, we find them to be virtually indistinguishable statistically from those outside the church.<sup>26</sup>

With careful examination we can conclude that the current system of age segregation does not produce fully committed followers of Christ, it does not build up doctrinal knowledge, and it does not strengthen the family or build up character. With these conclusions we must ask

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<sup>26</sup> *The Barna Group of Ventura, CA. [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)*

why are we so fully invested in it? The answer lies at the core of the philosophies that have guided the church in America for the last few decades. One motivator is to offer something appealing to those that attend the church services. Since the approach to Church Growth is to appeal to the felt needs of the people in society, we must deliver what they desire in regards to their children.

Another primary motivator is the opportunity to preach the gospel to children of irreligious people. Many churches use age-segregated children's ministry as an evangelistic tool. They attempt to reach the children and in turn connect with the parents. It is time to stop and ask ourselves if this is the way God desires for us to do church. What are the effects when we target the children as a means to reach the parents? If we get the children to make a profession of faith then who will disciple the children? The examples we see in scripture are where a head of the household accepts Christ and then the entire household is saved. Jesus says not to prevent the little children from coming to Him but there is no instruction for targeting them for the Gospel apart from their parents. We are losing a lot by engaging in this practice of age segregation that clearly has roots in Darwinian evolution and secular humanism. We have so quickly embraced the ways of the world as the way of training our children. It is time to take a fresh look at what God designed the church to be and how He designed it to operate.

### **Consumerism in the Church**

Another practice I have chosen to look at is the practice of allowing consumerism into the church. The idea that church members are consumers with needs that must be met by the church is not an idea that comes from Scripture. The Gospel is clearly presented as a choice one must make between the things of this world and the things

of God. This choice is one of denying oneself or following after one's own desires. We see Jesus make this choice very clear for those that asked Him what they must do. The rich young ruler was told to sell all he owned and follow Jesus. The man with the dying father was told to let the dead bury their dead. There is a tone in Jesus words that suggests a life of struggles awaits those that follow Him. He sends them out as sheep among wolves. He sets an expectation that families will divide over the Gospel. He sets the eyes of His followers firmly on the next life and not on this one.

This is not what we see happening in America today. We see a pleasant Gospel of self-improvement taking over. If you want Jesus, you can come to church, sit in stadium seating, have a latte, make no commitment and enjoy the show. In many churches you can partake in worship, communion, praise, and giving of offering without ever making a public profession of faith or being baptized. I have seen classified ads seeking Bible study leaders for churches. Some of these ads clearly state that no experience is needed to lead the studies. Is this the way the church is instructed to operate?

Are we now seeing a different gospel than the one that was delivered to the disciples? What affect does this have on the church? What affect does this have on the pursuit of holiness on the part of the church member? Can we really apprehend Christ in such a frivolous manner? What is truly lost or gained by such an approach to ministry? The proponents of such tactics rationalize the behavior by suggesting it is necessary in order to reach the people of the American culture. This argument is flawed at its foundation because it suggests that what we do is in some way necessary for God to reach people. This argument loses all merit when the results of these practices are examined. The statistics I have shared with

you already show that these methods have produced a steep decline in church attendance.

I have a theory that states “What you draw them in with, is what you draw them to.” If this theory is accurate, then the consumerist approach to ministry is attracting people to the consumerist offerings of the church, and not Jesus. When people are drawn to a church in this manner then they must be convinced to return. When people are drawn to Christ based on their recognition of their sinfulness they will seek to rid themselves of their sinfulness. When people are drawn into the church because their “felt needs” will be met, then they are there for the opposite reason of denying themselves and following Christ. The only question that remains is if the church can draw them in and effectively turn them into consecrated followers of Christ? The answer for that is seen in the culture.

One of the less recognized results of this approach to ministry is the programming of the work of ministry. When we attempt to draw people to the church as a means of growing the kingdom then we must make the draw appealing to the general public. In our hectic society this requires doing it in a way that fits on a calendar. If we are to meet the felt needs of the people we must identify those needs and look for ways to present appealing solutions to the public. In most cases this is accomplished by putting together programs to address the needs.

In America we have a smorgasbord of church offerings to please the palate. We have divorce workshops for adults and kids, singles groups, addiction meetings, and similar programs. We have special events to connect with people. We have car shows, carnivals, BBQ’s, craft fairs, and the list appears endless. There appears to be no end to the creativity of the American church in offering another way to draw people to the church. Each of these events requires organization and dedication in order to

operate. The church is consuming the resource of time in an effort to meet the felt needs of the community or to offer it something that may draw it into the church. It is such a common practice that it appears that no one questions its effectiveness or if it is taking away from what we should be doing instead. The modern American church is consuming its resources inside its four walls. Meanwhile the communities we are sent to transform are continuing to reject our message and our approach to church.

### **Effects on the Perception of the Holy Spirit**

When we program the work to this degree we limit the organic nature of the church. What was meant to be a free flowing work of the Holy Spirit has become a scheduled work that must fit into a calendar and abide by strict guidelines. A couple of visible outcomes have resulted from these practices. There is an attempt to program the work of the Holy Spirit or to neglect His work altogether. Some in the church will schedule the work of the Holy Spirit. They will have healing services or revival weekends. Some people, author included, do not think we should expect the Holy Spirit to abide by our strict schedule. I am sure that those that do such things have many rational reasons for why this is acceptable. Such things do cause a reaction in Christendom and the world. The reaction is usually one of skepticism.

After the Azusa Street Revival began, all eyes were focused on the Holy Spirit. What started as a desire to see the Spirit move, found itself quickly spreading outside of Los Angeles. As it spread people began to program the work. Imagine the skepticism when someone first said “come here on this specific night and get healed.” No such thing is seen in scripture. Healing was always recorded as a demonstration of God’s glory that

poured out as the disciples spread the Gospel. The press was quick to point out when the Spirit failed to show up. Some saw the opportunity as a means of wealth like Simon did in Acts 8. These traveling charlatans took advantage of the people and set up elaborate traveling road shows to take advantage of the new opportunity. Quickly the willingness to give money was linked to the ability to receive the benefits of the Holy Spirit.

What started out as a free flowing work of the Holy Spirit was quickly turned into a means of division within the American church. The theological arguments took sides. Some adopted the opinion that the manifest works of the Holy Spirit, those that were publicly displayed, ceased with the passing of the twelve apostles or the canon of scripture. This opinion is most widely based on 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. It is hard to see how the death of the apostles would in any way fulfill this passage. Some say this passage refers to the canon of Scripture. If the passage were referring to the canon of Scripture then the manifestation gifts would have continued for many years after this writing. When the passage is examined closely it is a very large stretch to formulate a doctrine that would necessitate the passing away of manifestations of the Holy Spirit as a result. The only two manifestation gifts mentioned are tongues and prophecies. If these have passed away then has knowledge also passed away? It is also mentioned in the same passage. I have heard some theorize that the knowledge mentioned here is the word of knowledge mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:8. This still leaves other manifestation gifts operating such as the word of wisdom from the same passage.

What we see as a result of this division of theology in America is that two extremes have formed in the church. There is one extreme that does not teach about or seek the manifestations of the Holy Spirit and another

that programs the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Somewhere in the middle of these two schools of practice is what we see described in Scripture. As the reformation of our church practices takes hold in America, I see the day coming when the Holy Spirit is again flowing freely through His people and manifesting God's glory to a lost and dying world.

## **Chapter 4: What is the Church?**

If we are to examine a coming reformation of church practices we must examine what God designed the church to be. We can claim to be many things. Our motives will be revealed at the end of the age. Jesus tells a story in Matthew 7 in the Sermon on the Mount of those, who at the judgement, claim to have done many things in God's name but He dismisses them saying He never knew them. This is a very sobering passage of scripture and should cause anyone that claims Christ as their Savior to pause and consider what He is telling us in this passage. These people prophesied, cast out demons, and performed works of power in Christ's name, yet He claims He never knew them. How can this be? How can we be sure that we are not a part of this group?

Most Evangelical Christians would affirm that the church is the mystical body of Christ that is composed of all believers throughout the world and the ages. In our daily practice we communicate a different definition with our actions. If the definition we profess was the definition that we lived, I think this work would be obsolete before it is finished. Since our practice displays a very different definition of the church, this work is needed in order to expose some of the harmful actions that have crept into our daily practices.

In the modern day American church, a very different definition of church has been portrayed to the public. Our daily practices define the church in the context of the local church we attend, instead of as the universal mystical union of all believers. The American church is commonly defined by its outward physical expression. When I started making disciples outside of this commonly accepted context, I saw many different reactions. The most common question I still get when asked about my church is "where is it located?" The physical location of



our buildings has become the defining statement of our local expression of what was meant to be the mystical body of all believers. When I began to gather with my disciples organically in homes or parks, many in the traditional form of church looked at us with critical eyes. At that time we were a part of a conservative denomination with a worldwide reach. I was ordained and involved in a leadership role on the district level. Even in our own denomination, with all of this in consideration, another pastor of that denomination accused me of leading a cult. His accusation stemmed from the apparent disregard for the traditions he was accustomed to seeing in church.

The way in which we gather is a primary element in defining the church in America. The location where we gather has become the defining mark of our churches in America. Our churches have become identified by the way they view the role of the Holy Spirit, what style of music they play, the role of drama in the service, the frequency of the offering of communion, and the acceptability of different styles of dress on Sunday morning. The idea that we will be judged by our public service is so entrenched in our church leadership culture that it is taught in church planting training seminars as an indisputable fact. With so much of our identity riding on our building and our public service, it is no wonder that so much of our available time and resources are put into those two things. We do not see either of these two things emphasized in the New Testament. Why has the church allowed its identity to be judged by these things?

When its location and public service define the church, it is easy for it to become the object of its own ministry. The local expression of church becomes the thing that must be built up and improved because it is how our church is judged. Is this how God originally intended His church to be defined? Has anyone stopped to

examine what God designed the church to look like? Let's take a time out and explore what God designed the church to be.

According to God, the church is the mystical body of all believers throughout all time. This is not usually a point of contention for Christians. The implication of this idea should have a great impact on how the church operates and how it is therefore defined. If the church is defined as all Christians who have their names written in the Book of Life (Revelations 20:15), then the role of the church should be defined by the role of Christians. If you want to know what the church should be doing you need go no further than to see what we as Christ followers are instructed to do. The leadership structure that God designed for the church was put there to equip us to do the work and to judge rightly when disputes arose. As it usually is when men take control, we have greatly complicated the church.

If you want to see the instructions for what the church should look like, you must first see the priorities of a Christ follower. Once you see the instructed priorities of a Christ follower you can then place the leadership structures of God over these priorities to help individuals to fulfill their purposes in Christ. What are some of these priorities? The greatest two are given by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 as the things on which all the Law and Prophets hang. You must love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. This is the first goal of any follower of Christ. Beyond these basics we are instructed to go and make disciples, care for the widows and orphans, care for the poor, and use our spiritual gifts to build up the Body of Christ, which is the church. As you can see, the ministry focus of the church was to be both the world and the Body of Christ. Leadership was established to oversee the administration of these ministries, protect the flock from false doctrine, and to

equip the saints for these works of service. Over the course of history, men have grabbed more control and have moved the ministry to places of more control. Many church leadership structures oversee and control things that they are not instructed in scripture to control.

One of the most common examples of this is geographical control of ministry. It is common in American churches to limit where people under a church's authority can do ministry. At one point in my ministry, my wife and I felt called to start a new work about ten miles west of our current home. The denomination we were under at the time said we could not do that without the approval of a rather large church that was about twenty miles from the city where we wanted to start. The explanation was that this territory was within their "footprint." They expected to draw people from this area to their services and a new work there would have to be approved by them. They did not approve and we were denied the opportunity to start a work there. As of today, neither that church nor that denomination has a work in that area. This type of control is never seen in the New Testament. In the book of Acts, we find Paul being led to his next missionary assignment by the Holy Spirit. The church elders simply affirmed him and sent him out. We have no record of them assigning him a specific territory to work. The Holy Spirit is the one who sends and decides where to send.

How did God design the church to operate? What is God's definition of the church and how do we get back on track with the way God designed us to operate? The primary definition used by God to define His church and His people is the presence of His Spirit. As you look throughout the book of Acts you will see that the early church was more concerned with receiving the Holy Spirit than they were with saying the right salvation prayer. Where people demonstrated the presence of the Holy

Spirit, they were baptized into the church. If they did not demonstrate the presence of the Spirit, they were asked to receive Him. When someone went to a new area to establish a work, they preached the Gospel until people repented. They then gathered the new believers and began to teach them the things of God. They set the doctrine and practices in order and identified elders to entrust with oversight. They then left the new believers and kept watch over them as they went to establish other new works. They wrote letters to the people of the church to clarify teaching and bring correction. As needed they sent trusted leaders back to the churches to assist in correcting error and providing teaching.

When the church became legal and began to locate in buildings, it also adopted the practice of allowing those who did not possess the Holy Spirit to enter into the worship gatherings. The church became an institution and began to operate like an institution. What are the effects of allowing unbelievers into the church? How can an unbeliever be a useful part of a body that is based on spiritual gifts? What of spiritual value can someone offer to the church if they themselves do not possess the Spirit? The answers to these questions can only be fully appreciated when we see the church the way God sees the church. That will require us to see everything from God's perspective.

## **Chapter 5: Supremacy of the Great Commission**

The Bible is a unique expression of our Creator. The Bible never attempts to make an argument for the existence of God. It begins with the very bold statement, “In the beginning God.” It does not ask the reader to consider the possibility or examine the evidence for or against. The Bible is a declaration of God. What is the Bible declaring about God? It declares that God is the creator of everything. It declares there is no other God besides Him. It declares He is all powerful, all knowing, and is supreme over all of His creation. The Bible declares the glory of God.

The Bible is not a textbook for life as some have made it out to be. It is not just a historical account of God’s people and our Savior even though it contains historical accounts. The Bible is a written declaration of God’s glory that focuses on the three main expressions of that glory in the physical realm. These expressions are the creation, God’s people, and Jesus Christ. Jesus is the ultimate expression of God’s glory in physical form. In Christ the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form according to Colossians 2:9.

It is only when we see creation in its intended context that we can begin to understand the church in its intended context. In Romans 1, the apostle Paul states that God’s invisible attributes, His divine nature and His eternal power, can be clearly seen and understood through what has been made. The creation declares the glory of God and every person is without excuse. That which is known about God is evident within them. The declaration of the glory of God to the physical realm is made through the physical creation.

Where and how is the declaration of God's glory made to the spirit realm? Paul covers this in his letter to the Ephesians. In chapter three Paul tells us that the manifold wisdom of God is now made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Something is being declared by the church, to the spirit realm, and Paul calls it the manifold wisdom of God. What is this wisdom? In 1 Corinthians 2 Paul speaks of it. This wisdom is the wisdom of God that is foolishness to men. It is only understood by the Spirit of God. This wisdom is the recognition of Jesus Christ. It is the recognition of the greatest declaration of God's glory that the physical realm has ever seen. It is the recognition that through Christ all things will declare that God and only God is God!

Creation is the declaration to man that God is God. The church is the declaration to the spirit realm that God is God. Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression to both that God is God. When we understand this we can begin to see how important it is to be a good steward of our environment. We can also see how important it is to keep a spiritual eye on the things the church does. Satan is always trying to corrupt the expression of God's glory. He is trying to destroy the creation. He is trying to destroy people. When we see the world through God's eyes we can begin to understand our roles and responsibilities better.

When we neglect our role as the keepers of the creation then that declaration to men is corrupted. When we neglect our roles in the church then that declaration to the spirit realm is corrupted. Since the role of the church is to declare something to the spirit realm we must understand that this is a spiritual declaration. When we invite unbelievers into the worship gathering what does that declare to the spirit realm? Can an unbeliever declare to the spirit realm that God and only God is God? If they

have not recognized it and accepted it as truth, then what are they declaring?

God sees the church as a living declaration of His glory. It is designed to live in the Holy Spirit, be defined by the Holy Spirit, and declare God's glory to the spirit realm. The purpose of the church is to meet together to equip the saints for the works of service that express God's glory. If the people that gather as the church do not possess the Holy Spirit, are not gifted with spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit, and do not understand what they are there to do through the Holy Spirit, then how effective is the church?

When God made Adam, He made him in His image. What is generally accepted by this language, is that Adam contained the likeness of God. The things about God that could be contained in a physical creation were contained in Adam. Adam had volition, intellect, and emotion. Adam was a physical representation of the glory of God. When Adam was sent away from the Garden of Eden he was given a command to be fruitful and multiply. This command is repeated throughout Scripture. It is at the foundation of every covenant relationship between God and man. In a sense, God was commanding Adam and others, to go and reproduce little likenesses of God. These would be other unique expressions of God's glory. The covenant command for Adam was to reproduce and be a steward of the creation. In essence, take care of God's declaration of glory to man and reproduce more people capable of making the declaration to the spirit realm.

In Jeremiah 23 we see a messianic prophecy that declares that God will bring back the remnant and make them to be fruitful and multiply. This is fulfilled in Jesus Christ since through Christ we are reconciled to God and the Holy Spirit is restored to man. This prophecy in Jeremiah links for us the physical and spiritual nature of

reproduction that is at the heart of God. God desires to multiply His spirit in the hearts of men so His glory can be declared to the spirit realm through the church! This is done as we fulfill the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the disciples after His resurrection.

The Great Commission, as found in Mathew 28; is the spiritual command to be fruitful and multiply. When we go and make disciples the Spirit is restored to sinful men as they recognize and profess that God and only God is God. This declaration is made in the spirit realm. It is totally a work of the Holy Spirit. We cannot do it of our own efforts. We cannot produce the transaction between Christ and man that makes this declaration. Nothing we do apart from the direction of the Holy Spirit can assist in it. Only as we go and make disciples do we fulfill the commands of Christ. Only as we teach disciples to obey, do we declare that God is God? Only as we gather the disciples together does the gathering declare to the spirit realm that God is God. Only as we teach disciples to obey does the spirit realm believe that we truly believe that God is God.

The defining task of every disciple is to go and make disciples. In Matthew 28:18-20 it says the following:

“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In order to make a disciple, we must know what a disciple looks like. We must be able to define a disciple. If we cannot do this then how will we know if what we



are doing is in line with what we are commanded? In the next chapter, we will take on the task of defining a disciple of Christ.

## **Chapter 6: What is a Disciple?**

What is a disciple? This may sound like an absurd question to ask when the word is so clearly etched into our theology as Christians. Jesus made disciples. Eleven of the twelve disciples He made appear to have continued to make disciples after His return to heaven. He gave His greatest statement of direction to the disciples after His resurrection. In Matthew 28 we see recorded what has become known as the Great Commission. This commandment from Christ to His disciples set in motion the expansion of the church under the New Covenant. Within roughly 200 years, the known world would be turned upside down in their religious philosophy. The early church had the resurrected Christ as their cornerstone, the Holy Spirit as their power and guide, and the Great Commission as their marching orders.

The book of Acts records some of the history of the early church. In chapter one Luke appears to reference the Great Commission when he speaks of the “orders” Christ gave the Apostles through the Holy Spirit. Again in verse 8 Jesus reaffirms their task of being witnesses to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus intended everyone that was brought into the kingdom to be taught these commands. The command itself contains the instructions to teach them all that was commanded. Jesus’ intention is for you to be taught how to be a disciple and then by the power of the Holy Spirit to go and be a witness for Him and teach others to be a disciple.

Something has happened along the way. Somehow we have carried the marching orders as a badge of honor without actually following the orders. The fact is that very few American Christians take the Great Commission seriously as a personal command that they are to fulfill. Somehow the responsibility to make disciples has

apparently shifted to the church as an organization, instead of to each member of the church as an individual. However the church is never spoken of as an institution in the New Testament. Another disturbing problem is the difficulty some have in defining what is a disciple. If God commands us to make a disciple then God would surely not leave us in the dark as to what one looks like.

John 14-17 records the dialogue that Jesus had with His disciples after He shared the Last Supper with them. This is the last recorded instruction before His arrest and execution. What we find in these passages of Scripture is the summing up of the last three years of training. Jesus focuses the attention of the disciples on the fact that He is leaving. He instructs them, encourages them, warns them, and prays for them. If you want to know what Christ intends for you to do, there is no better place in Scripture to find out than right here.

Starting in chapter fourteen we see Jesus describe the characteristics of a disciple. In verse twelve Jesus says the disciple will do greater works than He has done. In verse thirteen He says that whatever is asked in His name, that He will do. In verses fifteen through twenty-four, He says, if we love Him, we will keep His commands. Do you love Him? Are you keeping His commands? The rest of chapter fourteen is a discussion on the Holy Spirit and the work that He will do in the lives and minds of the disciples.

In John 15:1-11 we have the parable of the vine. This is a summary of the life of a disciple. We are to abide in Christ. This word translated as abide carries with it many different meanings. The first possible meaning is one of location. It would mean to stay in the same location. This cannot be the meaning here because the entire section of Scripture is about Jesus going where they cannot go. The second possible meaning is one of time. It refers to enduring or surviving. This also seems an

unlikely interpretation given the context. The third possible meaning refers to their condition. It implies remaining as one or not to become different. By the context, this is the most likely choice. Jesus tells them in verse three that they are already clean. Then in verse four He asks them to remain that way. A disciple seeks to lead a consecrated life. A disciple will be cleansed by God and seek to remain that way.

I find the comparison to the vine to be a fascinating element in Jesus' teaching. By using the vine analogy He clearly places the context of the teaching as one of reproduction. Jesus is not teaching about fruit of the Spirit as Paul does. He is clearly speaking of making grapes! Verse eight is the most controversial verse in this passage. Verse eight indicates that we can prove to be Jesus' disciple by bearing fruit. If the context suggests that this is a context of reproduction, which I think is clear, then you prove to be a disciple when you make other disciples. An alternate reading that is offered for this passage suggests, that by bearing fruit we "become" Jesus' disciple.

So let us summarize what is a disciple. A disciple walks in the power of God. A disciple asks things of God and receives them because the disciple has their mind set on things above. A disciple gets cleansed and then stays that way. The life of a disciple is a life of consecration. With our mind set on things above, our life cleansed of sin, our spiritual disciplines helping us abide, and the Holy Spirit filling us and guiding us, we go and bear fruit and thus prove to be Christ's disciples. How many in the church today have been taught what it means to be a disciple? With this definition of a disciple let us press on through scripture to discuss what you must do to be a disciple.

## **The Need for Consecration – The Holy and the Profane**

Jesus' words in Luke 9: 23 indicate that the prerequisites to following Christ are the choice to deny yourself, endure suffering, and follow obediently. Anyone who has asked Christ to save them has at one time likely pondered these words. What do they mean? How much of myself must I deny? What does it mean to take up your cross daily? What instructions do I follow? This passage appears to give an almost militant instruction for the follower of Christ. How can this teaching from the mouth of our Lord line up with the consumerist approach to sharing the Gospel that we see so prevalent in America today? One thing you can be sure of is that if Jesus said it, He meant it. If He meant it and you want to follow Him, then you better learn what it means and apply it to your life.

Remember the teaching that was just examined in John 15. Jesus' instructions about abiding require us to be cleansed and to seek to stay that way. As with every other great work of God throughout history, it starts with consecration. Before the giving of the Law, Moses told the people to consecrate themselves. Before entering the Promised Land, Joshua told the people to consecrate themselves. As you enter into the new covenant relationship with Christ as His disciple He wants you to be consecrated. How are we consecrated? Jesus explains this in John 17. The Holy Spirit will sanctify us through the Word. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts the world of sin. Our job is to repent when we are convicted.

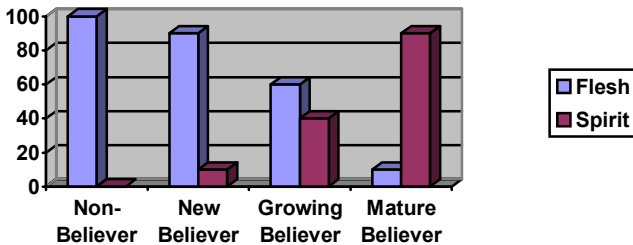
Consecration is the process of seeking to understand the difference between the holy and the profane. It is seeking godliness. When we seek godliness it requires us to seek to live a disciplined life. See how Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:7,

“But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness”

When we seek to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness it requires action on our part. The holy life is a disciplined life.

### Understanding Spiritual Disciplines

The Christian life is a life of discipline and obedience. Attempting to live as a Christian without applying spiritual disciplines to your life is like trying to guide a car without a steering wheel. You will be tossed about by every bump in the road. The establishment of spiritual disciplines in the life of a believer helps to mature them in the faith. Take this picture of the spiritual battle that rages in our lives.



Non-believers have no Spirit of God dwelling in them so they are ruled by the desires of the flesh. They live in the physical realm and are ruled by the five natural senses through their mind, will and emotions.

New believers receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation and they are given the ability to walk in the Spirit and discern spiritual things. They have fed

the desires of the flesh for many years and must now deny themselves and take up the cross of Christ. For the new believer this is a troubling time. They are more aware of their sins and faults. This is a good sign. It indicates that God is at work in them.

Growing believers are beginning to mature in Christ's teachings. They are starting to follow Christ. They are still aware of the flesh and at times it overtakes them. They immediately know when this happens and seek to resolve the transgression through confession and repentance.

The mature believer has mastered the spiritual disciplines and is walking under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. While not free from the flesh they have learned to rule over it in way that keeps it from ruling their lives. They are not sin free Christians, but rather Spirit filled and following His leading wherever He directs.

The goal of disciple making is:

*To bring non-believers to spiritual transformation and full maturity in Christ as they learn to follow Him in obedience and love.*

In order to make a disciple we must first declare Christ and His saving work to them. Many call this evangelism. Once a person has accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior we must encourage them to engage in spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines put to death the power of the flesh in our lives and build our spiritual strength to a point where the Holy Spirit rules our lives and we subdue the flesh.

There are ten individual spiritual disciplines I see either instructed or displayed by example in the Bible.

1. Prayer - communicating with God.

2. Bible Study - understanding the Word of God.
3. Giving - intentionally giving tithes and offerings.
4. Serving - having a ministry.
5. Fasting - deliberately choosing to abstain from food.
6. Meditation - going deeply into passages of Scripture.
7. Evangelism - sharing your faith with another person or group.
8. Stewardship - surrendering your possessions to the Lord.
9. Journaling - recording your thoughts and events in a book.
10. Living by Faith – walking in the Spirit.

Upon further examination we find that there are two groupings found in these disciplines. There are five inwardly focused disciplines. These are disciplines that are meant to work on the inner part of who we are. Then there are five outwardly focused disciplines that effect others as we practice them. The disciple should have all ten disciplines active in their life.

Here are the two groups.

Inward: Fasting, Bible Study, Prayer, Meditation, and Journaling

Outward: Living by Faith, Giving, Stewardship, Serving, and Evangelism

In each of these two groups there is one key discipline that unlocks the power to stay in the others.

### **The Inward Disciplines**

Fasting is the key to unlocking the power of God to stay in the inward disciplines. Fasting builds spiritual strength over the flesh and helps us learn how to rely on



the Spirit. While fasting has other uses, for the new believer fasting can help build spiritual strength when applied as a discipline. When fasting is used properly it can aid the believer in becoming disciplined.

Notice the link in the other disciplines as well. Bible study aids in meditation as we seek to memorize and understand Scripture. Prayer aids in journaling as we seek to hear God's voice and record what He has spoken to us through our time with Him. The disciplines are meant to work together. Doing all the disciplines in some fashion is better than focusing on one at a time.

## **The Outward Disciplines**

Living by faith is the key to unlocking the power of God to stay in the outward disciplines. Deciding to rely on God's word instead of your own understanding is a discipline and not a maturity level. We can decide to do this in every occasion. Deciding to live by faith will help us put into practice the outward disciplines. These disciplines are not natural for most people. They require faith in order to do them. Just as with the inward disciplines, the other outward disciplines are linked. Giving is essential to good stewardship, which is handling all that we have in a godly manner. Serving will lead us to opportunity for evangelism.

As with all aspects of the Great Commission, we will reproduce what we are. We must practice what we preach. Apply these disciplines to your life if you expect to reproduce them in the lives of your disciples.

Spiritual disciplines help us to abide. When we lead a spiritually disciplined life we can more clearly hear from God. Hearing from God allows the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. When we are seeking to be consecrated, we will respond with repentance when we

feel conviction. As we repent of our sin and obey God, we declare His Glory as God alone.

A discipler helps us to see blind spots. They help us see where Satan has lied to us. They help us see deception for what it is. The process of consecration is the process of discovering our new identity in Christ. As we understand this new identity it changes us from what we believed we were, into what Christ made us to be. As we engage in making disciples we will bear fruit. This is the natural result of a healthy disciple. After we find Christ and engage in pursuing a spiritually disciplined life, we can join Christ in the work He came to do. The next step is to understand the mission.

## **Chapter 7: Setting Captives Free**

Isaiah 61:1-2

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the LORD And the day of vengeance of our God;

In Luke 4, we find Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth. He is in the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom. He was handed a scroll that contained the book of Isaiah and He turned to this passage and began to read. Can you imagine the surprise of those listening when He proclaimed that “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Why this scripture of all possible scriptures He could have chosen? Why is this one so significant that at the first recorded reading by Jesus in the synagogue He proclaims this scripture?

We gain some insight when we examine the passage a little further.

Isaiah 61:2-3 To comfort all who mourn, To grant those who mourn {in} Zion, Giving them a garland instead of ashes, The oil of gladness instead of mourning, The mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.

Jesus was declaring His purpose for coming to earth. The human race was afflicted and brokenhearted. It was being held captive like prisoners. Jesus came to destroy the hold that the captor has over man. This passage describes the ministry that Jesus came to fulfill. He came to declare

God's glory by tearing down the works of the devil. Can you see yourself in this passage? Are you His disciple? If you are His disciple you will seek to do what He came to do. Jesus came to set captives free. He came to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8 says

“The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”

Understanding this allows us to understand what Jesus is doing through us today.

Clearly Jesus was referring to himself as the “anointed one” in this passage. However, Jesus anointed you to do something when He placed His Spirit upon you. The role the disciple plays in the Body of Christ will vary by the gifts given to them. The call for the disciple is clear. We are to obey Christ and join Him in tearing down the works of the devil. We are to do what we see in Isaiah 61:1-3. We begin by consecrating ourselves first.

Consecration is the process whereby we die to the old and put on the new. It is a process of asking God to cleanse us and purify us from our sin and iniquity. Many Christians have never yet found their new identity in Christ. There is a great need for consecration in the lives of Christ followers. Our true freedom comes as we seek to know Christ and walk according to His commands.

Are you enjoying the Abundant Life that Jesus speaks of in John 10:10?

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have {it} abundantly. “

Have you found the abundant Christian life? Many Christians are living in fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, and pain from their past or current sinful lifestyles. Many still

carry the scars of past traumatic events. The devil has attacked us as we walk through this sinful fallen world. Many feel like they are under constant torment. We don't have to stay a victim. Christ has come to heal us and to set us free from bondage.

If you are abiding in Christ then you should be experiencing the life Christ came to give you.

In Christ we:

- Are justified by grace - Romans 3:24
- Have no condemnation – Romans 8:1
- Enjoy God's love – Romans 8:39
- Have hope – 1Cor 15:19
- We triumph – 2Cor 2:14
- Are a new creature – 2Cor 5:17
- Are ambassadors for Christ – 2Cor 5:20
- Are Children of God – Galatians 3:26
- Are God's workmanship created for good works – Ephesians 2:10

Are you enjoying this life in Christ? In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells some of the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in My word, {then} you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

People make a confession of repentance when they come to Christ. Some teach that this confession is a one-time work that accomplishes in us all that God has for us. It is true that all God has for us has been provided through Christ. However there is a process we must engage in order to appropriate what He has done for us. Just as you had to repent and confess Christ as Lord in order to be saved, you must also take on the work of

consecrating yourself. This involves submitting yourself to God and repenting when He convicts you.

Are you truly free? What does Jesus mean by this concept of being truly free? Many Christians have never experienced the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. In Romans 6, Paul talks of being made free from sin. Freedom from sin is freedom from its effects on our life and its power over us. If we have repented of our sins and asked Jesus to forgive us, then we have everything we need to live free in Christ. So why are so many Christians still living in bondage to the effects of the devil's work? Have you let Jesus destroy the works of the devil in your life?

One reason people don't walk in this freedom is that they do not fully examine the things they partake in on a daily basis. They do not adopt a disciplined lifestyle. God calls us to cleanse our lives from ungodly things so we can be vessels for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master.

2Tim 2:19-22

Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these {things,} he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love {and} peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

One major block to leading a free and abundant life for many Christians is the way in which we live our

life each day. In our modern society, it is increasingly difficult to draw clear lines between what is acceptable in our life and what is not. It is very important that we take steps to consecrate our life. It is important that you seek the Lord's approval on all the things you partake in on a daily basis.

Before Joshua led the people into the Promised Land he told them to consecrate themselves.

*Joshua 3:5 Then Joshua said to the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do wonders among you."*

The promise was that God would do wonders among them. If you want to experience the abundant life that Christ has promised (John 10:10) then consecration is the next step. To consecrate means to make or declare sacred; set apart or dedicate to the service of God. You begin by counting the cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and then affirming your commitment to Christ as your Savior and Lord. The cost has remained the same for over 2000 years. Jesus proclaimed it and Luke recorded it in chapter fourteen of his gospel.

*Luke 14:33  
In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

The abundant life in Jesus Christ requires a total commitment to follow. The part of our life that we withhold from God is the seat of our future troubles. It is essential that we surrender everything to Jesus. You may not have come to Christ in this way when you first believed. Many preachers have watered down the gospel. It is time to count the cost and make a new decision to

follow Jesus. Take a moment and read Luke 14:25-35. If you need to re-examine the Scripture now is the time. Look at Jesus' words and the cost He laid out for following Him. When you are ready to proceed read the following prayer out loud. I ask you to read it out loud because this is a declaration to the spirit realm.

**Dear Lord Jesus, I forsake all that I have in order to follow You. I repent of my sins and ask You to forgive me. Come into my life and be my Lord and Savior. I believe that You are the Son of God who came to earth to die on the cross for my sins. I believe that You rose to life on the third day and that today You sit enthroned in Heaven and one day You will return to earth. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit.**

Are you ready to consecrate yourself and begin to lead a life disciplined in the instruction and admonition of the Lord? Your next step is to engage in tearing down the works of the devil. In order to tear down the works of the devil you must first understand how the devil works and how we are to engage in the spiritual battle.

### **How Does Satan Work?**

Before we can become effective in battle we must understand who our enemy is and how he operates. In Ephesians 6:12 we are told:

“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].

It is clear that God intends for us to “wrestle” and to know whom we wrestle against. As we examine Scripture we



begin to get a picture of this enemy and its level of organization.

This enemy includes Satan or Lucifer which was cast out of heaven along with his angels (Revelation 12:9). Satan is the accuser of the people of God. These angels are referred to as fallen angels or demons. These spirits are opposed to the people of God and deceive the whole world. Scripture indicates that some of these spirits are territorial in nature (Daniel 10:13). They have the power to bind people in sin or sickness (Matt. 9, 12, & 17). They blind the minds of those who do not believe (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan and his demons work through lies and deception (John 8, Acts 5). They provoke people to sin against God (1Chronicles 21).

Satan and his followers attack us in many ways. Here are a few ways the scripture records for us. They tempt us through our own lust (James 1:14). These lusts are rooted in our iniquity. They attack our minds (2 Corinthians 4:4). They can use occult activity to lead us away from God (Deuteronomy 18). The attacks against us can be based in personal, ancestral, or corporate sin (Genesis 4, Exodus 20, 2 Samuel 21). Attacks can also be based in curses (Malachi 3, Luke 6, and Genesis 12). The attacks can also be allowed by God without any cause on the part of the one being attacked (Job 2:3).

We can categorize the attacks of the enemy based on how they affect us. Some attacks oppress the person. These come from outside the person. These attacks often use tools of the enemy like racism, violence, poverty, or oppression. Some sickness is demonic attack and may be caused by a spirit of infirmity (James 5, Luke 13). Another form of attack is to suppress the person, to keep them from being free to serve God without hindrance. These are attacks on the mind that come from within. They include fear, spiritual blindness, rebelliousness, and pride. Obsession is another way that the enemy

suppresses people. Obsessions include lust, power, greed, and anything else that can preoccupy us and keep us from God. Addictions such as drugs and alcohol can take the form of obsession. Obsession is rooted in our iniquity and must be dealt with on that level. It is not enough to deal with the sin when dealing with obsession. We must submit our iniquity to God so He can remove it.

One of the most controversial topics regarding how Satan and his forces operate is the topic of demon possession. We must first understand that demons can affect the physical realm but they do not have physicality. Their relationship with the world is not as physical beings but rather spiritual ones. We must take great care in attributing physical qualities to spiritual beings. While scripture is clear that angels can appear to take on physical form, it is not clear that they occupy time and space when they appear this way. Most of the controversy over demon possession comes from the debate over the ability to physically occupy a human body. I think this debate is unnecessary.

The scripture uses the term *daimonizomai*, (Matthew 4:24) which is interpreted by many as “possessed”. The more accurate interpretation would be “to be under the power of a demon” and not referring to physical occupation. In Acts 16:18, we see Paul command a spirit to come out of a girl. The command is to *apo*. In Mark 5:8, we see another example with Jesus and the demoniac of Gadarenes. Here the command in Greek is to *ek*. The common interpretation is one pertaining to physical location. However, an alternate interpretation is separation of one thing from another by which, the union or fellowship of the two is destroyed. John 13:27 contains the clearest argument for physical possession, but even here the alternate metaphorical meaning of entrance into any condition could be used without taking away from the context of the passage. Satan could have entered into a

condition with Judas whereby he could control him. We see in verse 2 of this passage where Judas was already giving into Satan's temptations.

Four words are used in the New Testament when telling of demons being cast out. The four words in the Greek are Ek, Apo, Exerchomai, and Ekballo. Each of these words has many meanings that are determined by the context of the passage. The meaning that refers to physical location is not required in these passages. If you choose to adopt those meanings, they would be acceptable, and are the commonly held interpretations. Since the words do not require the meaning to denote physical location, I see no need to imply it.

The debate surrounding the idea of possession really centers on the security of a believer to be protected from such an attack. If we remove the focus from one of physicality and center it on one of fellowship or control, then the issue becomes much easier to discuss. Satan seeks opportunity to deceive us. He works through lies and deception. When we believe his lies and deceptions we begin to make choices based on those lies and deceptions. The more lies we believe the more ability he has to influence our decisions. This can increase to a point of control that leaves us making decisions we do not want to make. If you doubt this for a moment, you should go and work with someone that is under the power of an addiction. They regularly make decisions that are bad for them and that they regret. Satan has them so deceived that he is manipulating their behavior.

Are those struggling with addiction the only ones that can be controlled in this way? The greater number of lies you believe, the easier it is for Satan to control you. Some are so bound by lies that God gives them over to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:28). Even professing believers can fall into believing the lies of Satan and making choices they do not want to make. Some operate in their

faith under the idea that Christ automatically sets us free from Satan and makes us impervious to his attacks. This is not true. If it were true we would have no reason for the armor of God! The truth is that even believers can fall under the influence of Satan's lies. This is where Satan builds his strongholds. Strongholds are areas of thought in our life that are based in lies. They are opposed to God and become ways for Satan to use us to attack others. Racism and violence are two great examples. For many years, people that professed Christ as their Savior have held to philosophies of racism and have committed acts of violence. Satan used these strongholds to attack other people. This is just one example of how he works.

We must understand that Satan is under God's sovereign control. God gives us free will and we can choose to believe the lies of the enemy. When we engage in a sinful life we give Satan opportunity to influence our decisions and even to have dominion over us (Romans 6). When we seek to consecrate ourselves and put to death sin in our bodies, we then destroy the works of the devil and fulfill the purpose of Christ's coming.

1 John 3:8: The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

In Job 1 we see an interesting exchange between God and Satan. In verse eight God asks Satan if he has considered His servant Job. God calls him a righteous and upright man. Satan responds in verse ten, that God has put a hedge of protection around Job and all that he owns. It is as if Satan has no ability to attack Job because of God's protection. Satan then provokes God to remove the protection and to see how Job will respond. In verse twelve, God gives Satan permission to touch all that Job

has, except for his body. Once Satan has permission he wastes no time in attacking Job. In one day he destroys all that he has except for his wife. Again in chapter two verse three, God asks Satan if he has considered his servant Job. God then gives him permission to attack his body but not to take his life.

This exchange between God and Satan shows us the limits of Satan's power. He has no ability to thwart God's will. He cannot penetrate where God will not allow. Satan's power is truly under God's authority and control. This topic is very difficult for many to grasp. If God is in control then why does He allow any evil? The main purpose for all of creation is to declare the Glory of God. It is declared in the physical and spiritual realm. When we look at things from an eternal perspective that includes both realms, it becomes easier to understand why God does these things. Job's recognition of God in spite of his circumstances declared God's glory to Satan. The story of Job went far beyond Job and his suffering. The story of Job has been used for hundreds, even thousands of years to teach people about God. If Job loved God, as it appears he did, would he not willingly suffer such things to help declare God's glory throughout thousands of years? Would you suffer for such a cause? When we see Job in light of God's glory and eternity, then what he suffered comes into perspective. Job had his fortunes restored and God's glory was declared throughout dozens of generations. It leaves me asking the question – have you considered God's servant Job?

Another Old Testament passage that gives us a glimpse into how Satan's army works is Joel 2. What is described here is a great, powerful and destructive army. In verse eleven it is called the Lord's army. Some in modern times have taken this passage to refer to a new move of God. They have assembled Christians under the banner of the army of Joel 2 and are preaching the coming

of a great move of God. I think the context of Joel 2 makes it clear that this army destroys. It is clearly sent by God and under His control (v.11). It will also be destroyed (v. 20) and nothing like it will arise again for many generations (v. 2). If this is the church, as some have determined, then the church will exist for a period of time where there was nothing like it before, and nothing like it after, for many generations. During this time it will lay waste the land and leave it like a desolate wilderness (v. 3). This is not a picture of the church that is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

A clearer picture of Joel 2 is to see the army as that of Satan and his forces. The metaphor of locusts is used to describe them. It is also used in Revelation 9 to describe the destroyers that come out of the smoke from the bottomless pit. When we see this army as the army of Satan, we can begin to see more clearly how Satan operates. The first things we see is that Satan and his army are under the control of God. We also see that he seeks to destroy the physical and the spiritual. His army is very organized. It advances in ranks and does not break them. His army leaves behind destruction.

When we look at this passage we may wonder why God would allow such an army to exist. I think the answer is made clear in the second half of the passage. The response of God's people that is described here is what God desires for His church. He instructs the people to return to Him with all their heart (v. 12). He says we should rend our hearts, assemble the people, consecrate a fast, and blow the trumpet. This passage is telling us to be zealous for the Lord and to minister the way He instructs us to minister. Look at verse eighteen. Then the Lord will be zealous for His land. The army will destroy the land in its advance and the church is not to forget that all of creation declares God's glory. The devastated places do not declare the glory of God. We must attend to the

devastated places and God will pour out His blessings on us as we minister according to His instructions.

So we can conclude that Satan and his army are under God's control. We can see that he works in an organized way to destroy the creation. This creation includes people and the land. God desires His people to battle as instructed. When they do this, God will be zealous for His land and have pity on His people (v. 18). It is important to note here what land and which people. Some will try to extend this to the nation of Israel and to the Promised Land. This may be accurate but that does not mean it is exclusively applied to these places. The principles we gather from this passage can be applied to the current day. God is unchanging. The passage describes how Satan's army works. We know his army is still at work today. Peter proclaimed that verse twenty-eight was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. If the army is still at work and the principles are timeless then we can apply them to the elect and all the earth.

We see the effects of this army playing out before our eyes in America today. Every major metropolitan area in America has an area that has been devastated by Satan. The inner cities of America have been wrecked by sin. We can see the physical effects of drugs, crime, racism, poverty, and many other tools of Satan. The army of Joel 2 advances through our streets as the people flee to the suburbs, chasing after the Garden of Eden. This army leaves behind a desolate and destroyed creation. Can you see it? In the coming reformation, the church must respond the way it is instructed in Joel 2:12-17. Are you ready to see the Lord be zealous for His land and His people?

What are we to do? What is our part in the spiritual battle? 1John 3:8 says that Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil. The works of the devil are destroyed as the lies of Satan are replaced with the truth

of God. Where people believe lies, they come under Satan's influence. Where people believe and obey the truth, they walk in the Spirit and defeat the enemy. Spiritual warfare is a battle for the mind. As we seek the Truth of God's word and submit to it, we put to death the flesh and thereby kill sin's power over us. Once we are dead to sin in our flesh, we live out our victory over the devil. Part of that victory is to go and repair the desolation.

What is a Christ follower to do? Our role is to seek to consecrate ourselves before God. We choose to submit ourselves to the grace God has provided for us. Just as with salvation, if we do not submit to God as Lord and repent of our sins, then the salvation that has been bought for us is of no benefit to us. All that we need to put our flesh to death has been provided for us, but we must submit to the Holy Spirit to claim its benefit. Many think that this process is automatic. They think that by asking Christ to save us we are free from the bonds of sin. It is true that Christ has provided everything we need to be free from the bondage of sin. Scripture tells us that even though we believe, we may still be in the bondage of our iniquity.

In Acts 8 we see a story of Philip, Peter, and Simon. Philip was traveling around preaching the Gospel, healing, and casting out unclean spirits. Simon was a practicing magician who performed signs and claimed to be someone great. Simon eventually believed and was baptized. The Apostles, Peter and John, heard that there were new disciples in Samaria so they went to pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the Apostle's hands he offered them money for the ability to do the same. Peter turns and tells him to repent for he is in the gall of bitterness and the bondage of iniquity. Simon responded to the gospel preached by an Apostle and was



baptized by him. Another Apostle then tells him that he is in the bondage of iniquity and needs to repent. This iniquity appears to be similar to the iniquity he had prior to his conversion. It appears that his repentance and baptism did not remove this iniquity.

In John 8:31-32, Jesus tells a group of Jews that had believed in Him that if they continue in His word they will be His disciples, and the truth will set them free. These two stories are consistent with the rest of the teaching of the New Testament. We are to enter into a process of getting free and staying free. We are to destroy the works of the devil in our lives by replacing his lies with the truth of God's word. We are to obey Christ's words and thus we will be His disciples and be set free. This is not a matter of salvation but rather a matter of receiving what Christ came to give us in this life and the next. Once we are free we will go and repair the devastated places. We will repair the damage that Satan and his army have accomplished. Through this, we will declare that God has dominion over all the earth.

Paul defines this to the Galatians as freedom:

Galatians 5:1: It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

We are instructed not to let Satan bind us again in a yoke of slavery. A common term in the church today is the term backslider. It refers to someone that was once living free from sin that has somehow "slid back" into sin as if there is a powerlessness on the part of the slider. I know from my own experience in my life and those of many of my disciples, that the truth is, these people were never free from the sin that overtakes them again. I think many people make changes to their behavior out of their own strength. If this is the case, then eventually, they

wear out. Their strength fails. They can no longer resist the temptation of what they are trying to defeat. Once we truly die to sin it loses its power over us.

I started smoking cigarettes when I was nine years old. Through my teen years I made many attempts to quit smoking. Each of these was an attempt in my strength. I spoke as if I was done with smoking. I appeared to be done with smoking. Each time I started again I would have been considered by many to be backsliding. Each time I tried to quit in my strength I had yet to die to smoking. At age twenty-two I was riding in my VW bug with my two-year-old son and I was again smoking a cigarette. I looked over to him holding a pencil in his mouth and imitating me. God spoke to me at that moment and asked me if I was going to lead him into that habit. At that moment I died to cigarettes. I threw them out the window and they lost their power over me. I quit for good. I did not just quit this time. I did not want cigarettes. I did not crave them. I still don't want them. The death in me of that sin was a work of God that Satan cannot undo unless I let him.

The freedom that Paul refers to is the freedom to choose to serve God and do His will. It is not a freedom that we have so we can abuse it and seek after our own pleasure. The idea of being free from sin is so controversial today. People always want to argue in extremes. Am I saying that I cannot choose to smoke again? That is not what I am saying. I am saying that because I have experienced this power of God in my life and I have died to sin, that I cannot imagine choosing to be put into bondage to cigarettes again. They hold no allure for me. They have nothing to offer me. The power of tobacco is broken in my life. I could smoke a cigar and not be addicted. I could smoke a cigarette without taking it up as a habit. The power is gone because I died to it.

So why do so many people live as if they are bound in sin after they accept Christ as their Savior? The reason is based in our freewill. We are made in the image of God. That means that we contain in us the communicable attributes of God. These include things like intellect, compassion, and even free will. God's purpose in creating us is to declare His glory. Each of these attributes is a part of that declaration. If God violated those attributes, then He would be violating the very purpose for creating us. Each of us gets to choose if we will submit our sinfulness to God's authority. We must take every thought captive. We must submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. We must take an active role in getting set free. Once we are set free from our sin, we must abide in Christ and remain free.

### **Standing Firm – Walking in the Free and Abundant Life**

Once you have taken steps to consecrate yourself, you must remain in your freedom. If you have asked God to forgive your sins then according to 1 John 1:9 He is faithful to forgive them and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Take a moment and thank God for His loving kindness towards you.

Galatians 5:1 tells us it is our job to remain free:

“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

You must stand firm in the decisions that were made. If you allow sin back into your life then you again become a slave to it. In Romans 6, we are told to consider

ourselves dead to sin. We are told not to let sin reign in our mortal body so that we obey its lusts. We are to present ourselves as one alive from the dead so that sin will not be master over us. How can we have the power over sin if it has ruled us for so long? We must stand firm in Jesus Christ who has set us free from sin. How do we do that? We must recognize how our enemy works. We must put on the full armor of God and stand against the devil.

Ephesians 6:10-19 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places.} Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;** in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil {one.} And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION,** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and {pray} on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,

Let's break down these instructions.

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*

We do not fight the battle in our own strength. We must learn to be strong in the Lord.

*Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual {forces} of wickedness in the heavenly {places.} Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.*

We put on the armor of God in order to stand firm against the devil. We have a real enemy. We are in a real battle. It requires real action on our part. We must put on the armor. We must stand firm in Christ's strength. We must understand where the battle is fought. It is fought in the spiritual realm. We must understand that our enemy is defeated in Christ. He can only have victory over us if we let him.

Our temptation is in the flesh. We fight the temptation by strengthening our spirit and denying our flesh. Our spiritual weakness gives our enemy an opportunity to tempt us in the flesh. In order to walk in your newly found freedom you must stand firm in the spirit. This means you must strengthen the inner man. This is Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. Take a moment and read this passage. How do we strengthen the inner man? We put on the armor of God.

*Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON*

*THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and  
HAVING SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE  
PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;*

Notice the three instructions here are past tense. You cannot put on the full armor of God until you do these things. You must examine your life for deception. This requires you to renounce lies and declare truth. Once you have girded yourself with truth you can continue putting on the armor. You must confess your sin and ask Christ to cleanse you of all unrighteousness (1John 1:9). You must prepare yourself through study to understand the Gospel of peace. Once you have done this you are ready to enter the battle. There is something more that is required in order to fight the battle.

*in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Faith! Faith is required in order to stand. Faith extinguishes the attacks of the enemy. Faith is our shield against the enemy. We use faith when we believe God. When the enemy lies in our ear, it is faith in God's true word that stops the attack. Without faith we cannot please God or stand against the devil. We take up the shield of faith when we declare that we believe God.

*And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

We stand firm against the devil when we understand our salvation. We understand our salvation by understanding the word of God. We understand the word of God when His Holy Spirit reveals its meaning to us. We fall to our enemy when we lean on our own

understanding. We fall to our enemy when we fail to rest in the finished work of Christ.

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,*

Standing in the finished work of Christ, by faith we seek to understand the Word of God through the Spirit. With prayer and petition we stay alert and persevere, interceding for each other. The way to walk in the Spirit is to understand that the battle is won in Christ. Your job is to have faith, be alert, intercede, and pray.

The devil will attempt to regain a place in your life. He has no power to do this. The only way the enemy gets to have a foothold in your life is if you let him. If you stand firm in the finished work of Christ, and do not give in to the desires of your flesh, then he has no power over you. Stand in your righteousness. Ask God to search your heart for hidden sin. Repent of any sin that you have committed. Accept God's forgiveness and declare your position of righteousness in Christ.

Seek the preparation of the Gospel in the Spirit. Begin to study God's Word. If you have never read the Bible from beginning to end, this is a great time to start. Do not approach Scripture as a textbook. The Bible is the revelation of God to man. Treat it as such. Read a little and ask God to show you the Truth of His Word through His Holy Spirit.

Pray! Come before the throne of God and seek His Glory. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. See the Lord's prayer in Luke 11 as an example of how to pray. Don't allow your prayer time to become a list of things you want. God knows the things you need. Let your prayer time be a time of relating to your God and Savior.

Make petitions for the saints. Take some time in prayer to enter into the spiritual battle on behalf of others. The Bible tells us in James 5:

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

Are you ready to battle? Approach God on behalf of others. Ask for spiritual things. Seek the spiritual victory in your battles. End your time with God by asking Him to direct you today. Seek to walk in the guidance of the Holy Spirit each day.

If you have been in bondage for a long time, you have probably developed patterns of behavior in your life. Titus 2 talks of godly patterns being developed in your life. Throughout Scripture we are told to submit ourselves to authorities and others in the Body of Christ. You need accountability if you want to change your behavior patterns.

Discipleship is essential to your spiritual growth. God commands all followers of Christ to make disciples. A discipler will bring accountability to your daily life. A trusted discipler will help you identify any remaining strongholds in your life. Since we know that Satan works through deception, a discipler can help you to see the truth. This is an essential part of the Christian life. Walking with a discipler will help you learn to be a disciple maker. Revelation 12 tells us this:

“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

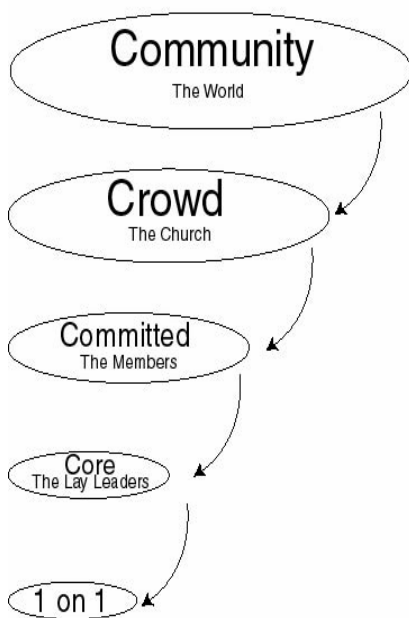


One of the ways we overcome our enemy is by our testimony. You need to declare the work that God has done in you. It is time to prepare your personal testimony. God has done a work in you in order to declare His glory. It is up to you to declare the glorious work He has done in you. Take some time to ask God to help you to communicate what He has done for you. Working through your past can help you to heal from the pain that you have experienced. When you get past the pain you can declare to others your victory in Jesus.

## Chapter 8: Gathering the Bride of Christ

The current model of church that permeates America is based on something like this.

### Modern American Model of Church



#### Current Results

- \* Community is seen as a source to build the church.
- \* Establishes a weak link between the members and the crowd.
- \* Results in a worship service that is filled with unbelievers.
- \* Enables a consumer mentality towards Church and God.
- \* Creates very few discipleship relationships
- \* Resource intense and difficult to reproduce quickly.

Programs and events are designed to draw people into the church in hopes of assimilating them into the church so they can hear about Christ. This “Come and

See” approach for evangelism connects people to the church by appealing to what they like, want, or feel are their needs.

There is a common assumption that the early church operated in much the same manner as we see today. There is no Biblical evidence for many of the practices widely adhered to in the modern day American church. One of the most common practices that cannot be supported from scripture is the practice of bringing unbelievers into the worship service. This practice would have been unheard of in the Old Testament times. Under the Law, only those who were a part of the covenant could partake in the activities of the temple, which included worship and sacrifices. (See Exodus 12:48 and Genesis 17:14 as examples).

In Ezekiel 44:7, we see an entire priestly line being cursed by God for allowing those who are uncircumcised in heart and flesh into the sanctuary. The language here indicates that this pollutes the house of God and breaks the covenant. The question then becomes one of whether God changes His mind about those outside the covenant and allows them into His worship under the New Covenant.

1 Corinthians 14 has been used to indicate that the early church regularly had unbelievers entering into its worship services. This is the only passage in the New Testament that I have seen used in this way. All other passages that I have seen used are clearly examples of the Gospel being preached in the open public and not the church gathering for worship. This instruction from Paul is unique in that it is giving instruction for how the church should gather. This passage has also led to controversy over the proper use of the gift of tongues.

1 Corinthians 14:22-25

22 - So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe (*pisteuō*) but to unbelievers (*apistos*); but prophecy {is for a sign,} not to unbelievers (*apistos*) but to those who believe (*pisteuō*).

23 - Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men (*idiōtēs*) or unbelievers (*apistos*) enter, will they not say that you are mad?

24 - But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever (*apistos*) or an ungifted (*idiōtēs*) man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

25 - the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

As we break down the passage we must make note of the context.

- Tongues are a sign not to those who believe (*pisteuō*) but rather to *apistos*, which is translated here as unbelievers.
- Prophecy is a sign not to unbelievers (*apistos*) but rather to *pisteuō*, which is translated here as believers.

Tongues are a sign to unbelievers (*apistos*).

Prophecy is a sign to believers (*pisteuō*).

In the beginning of chapter fourteen, Paul is outlining why prophecy is superior to tongues for edifying the church. In verse twenty-three a hypothetical is stated, “If the whole church is gathered together and all speak in tongues.” We must remember that the hypothetical is given to make a point. What is the point? Is it that unbelievers’ regularly entered the services and therefore they would be converted? If tongues are being spoken,

they are for a sign to unbelievers. The passage says, “*if* ungifted men (*idiōtēs*) or unbelievers (*apistos*) enter, will they not say that you are mad?” If tongues are a sign for *apistos*, and it is correctly translated as unbelievers, why would Paul expect this reaction?

In verse twenty-four we see the same gathering with all prophesying. Prophesying is the sign to believers. Paul then says: “*if an unbeliever (apistos) or an ungifted (idiōtēs) man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.*” Why would an unbeliever be convicted by something that is not a sign for unbelievers? I think the answer lies in the word being translated here as unbeliever.

The available possible definitions of the word *apistos* are offered below.<sup>27</sup>

- 1) unfaithful, faithless, (not to be trusted, perfidious)
- 2) incredible
  - a) of things
- 3) unbelieving, incredulous
  - a) without trust (in God)

Most Bible translations offer the translation of the word *apistos* as unbeliever in all of this passage. The context will indicate that this approach to translation leaves the passage confusing. If verse twenty-two is truly speaking of believers and unbelievers, as in reference to their state of salvation, then there is a contextual problem

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<sup>27</sup> Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *apistos* (*Strong's 571*)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2009. 24 Jul 2009. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G571&t=KJV> >

with the passage, if we carry the same interpretation of the word through the rest of the passage. We would be better off to understand the meaning of the word *apistos* as one of its alternate renderings in the later verses as is indicated by the context.

22 - So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who have faith (*pisteuō*) but to unbelievers (*apistos*); but prophecy {is for a sign,} not to unbelievers (*apistos*) but to those who have faith (*pisteuō*).

23 - Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men (*idiōtēs*) or those without trust (in God) (*apistos*) enter, will they not say that you are mad?

24 - But if all prophesy, and those without trust (in God) (*apistos*) or an ungifted (*idiōtēs*) man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all;

25 - the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

The contrast is made here between tongues and prophecy. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers and prophecy is a sign to believers. The reactions in both verses 23 and then 24 and 25 are consistent with the reaction we would see from a believer. A believer would not see tongues as a sign and a believer would be convicted by prophecy. The context of this part of Paul's letter is to explain why prophecy is a superior gift in the church. Prophecy builds up the believers in the church.

Early in this chapter, Paul instructs those that speak in tongues to remain silent in the church if there is no interpreter. The reason for this is because the gift of tongues is a sign for unbelievers. If there is no expectation that unbelievers will be present in the worship gathering, then tongues are not useful as a sign. Tongues are only

valuable in the church if they are interpreted by way of revelation, knowledge, prophecy or teaching. If they will not be interpreted, they will only benefit the speaker since there should be no unbelievers present to receive the sign.

In this controversial passage of scripture, we can now see that Paul is instructing a church made up entirely of believers. The instruction is to do things that will build the faith and gifting of those that may enter. Verse twenty-three through twenty-five are not speaking of those that lack saving faith but instead it speaks of those, like Thomas, who lack faith in the works and presence of God. The same word *apistos* is used here and in John 20:27 where Thomas doubts that he is standing before the risen Lord.

John 20:27: Then He said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving (*apistos*), but believing (*pistos*)."

It is unlikely that Jesus is considering Thomas, who was counted among the twelve, as being an unbeliever. Jesus had already affirmed that He had lost none but Judas (John 17:12). The truth is that our modern Bible translations were made after the practice of mixing unbelievers in the worship service had long been an established tradition.

After considering this passage of Scripture let us move on to another passage that is often overlooked in regards to the church gathering. It is found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

14 - Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

15 - Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

16 - Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17 - "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

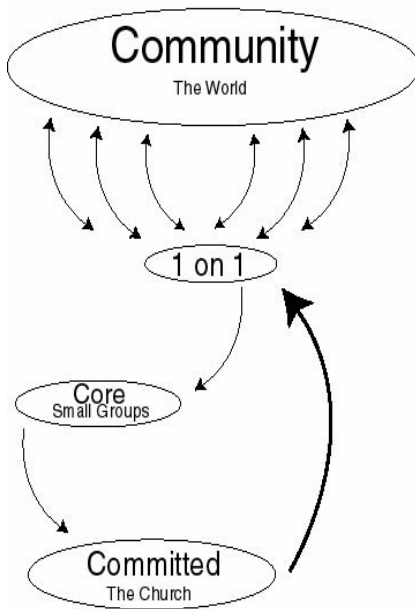
18 - "And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

Many commentators have dissected this passage over the years. It has been applied to the business world, marriage, and even to entering into pagan temples or other types of religious worship centers. The place it is rarely applied is in a literal sense to the worship gathering. What is the reason the instruction is not applied here? Is it not clear? Or is it more likely that it conflicts with the methodology and traditions that are binding the practices of the modern church? You decide.

One thing that is clear from the passage is that the two things that are never to be “yoked together” are Christians and unbelievers. The point is stressed emphatically as Paul takes the comparison to extremes by using Christ and Belial as the comparisons. Why would we bring unbelievers into a service that does the things we see described in 1 Corinthians? Could the unbeliever participate in a meaningful way? Could they offer up a spiritual gift for the edification of the body? Can God’s Word edify them prior to their accepting Christ as their Savior? The Bible clearly says in 1 Corinthians 2:14 that the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to the natural man. He cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned.



# Disciple Driven Model of Church



## Current Results

- \* Community is seen as the mission field
- \* Establishes a strong link between the church and the community.
- \* Results in a worship service that is filled with believers.
- \* Deters a consumer mentality towards Church and God.
- \* Is based in discipleship relationships
- \* Easy to reproduce quickly.

The model of church that more closely resembles the early church is found outlined below. This model relies on disciples making disciples. The church is a natural product of this disciple making process. The responsibility for disciple making falls on each disciple. Everyone must learn to make disciples.

In the Disciple Driven Model of church every believer is discipled by someone. It avoids the traps of invitation and attraction so every person enters the church through a discipleship relationship. This change in the structure allows some extraordinary things to develop.

1. The ministry of the church is focused on the world, not within the walls of the church.
2. Small groups become the training ground for committed disciple makers.

3. The church can exist for the purpose God intended without the pressure to change its structure to appeal to the lost or the fear of being ineffective.
4. As the church assembles to worship and take communion, it then releases the members to minister in one-on-one relationships with the lost in the world.
5. The responsibility to reach the lost is that of every member working through the Holy Spirit. The responsibility is not left to the church or the clergy.
6. The leadership can focus on equipping the saints for the works of service as outlined in Scripture.
7. As new believers are brought into the church, they are quickly trained and sent out to make disciples, which enables a multiplication movement.
8. Resources are directed through disciples towards the lost world and not consumed by events, programs, and buildings.

With this simple change to the operation of the church, we can return to something that more closely resembles what we see in the early church. The way in which we reach the world is only one aspect of the church. Another important aspect is what we do when we gather together.

### **What Should We Do When We Gather?**

Under the Old Testament Law, the procedure for the administration of our religious practices was clearly outlined. We were given detailed instructions for how to do the things God instructed us to do. In the New Testament the instruction for “how” is not so clear. We are given instruction in what to do but we get very little instruction on how to do it. One exception is church discipline. This is outlined in Matthew 18. The church is not instructed on where to meet as it was in the Old

Testament. We see meetings in the days after Pentecost occurring in the Temple. We also see meetings described as being “from house to house.”

The instructions for who should lead the church are also clear. Ephesians 4 outlines the gifts that God has given to lead the church. It is important to note that these are not offices, as we find in the church today. They are not positions that are filled by interviewing and hiring. These are gifts that are recognized and elevated as they work among the people. What each gift does is not specifically outlined. I think this is due to the fact that these are spiritual gifts and not offices. If the Spirit is leading the person possessing the gift then the daily tasks do not need to be outlined. One of the grave mistakes of the modern church is to turn leadership into offices that can be filled and managed like business positions. The purpose of the leadership gifts is made clear. They are to equip the saints for the works of service. What are these works? They are tearing down the works of the devil and setting the captives free. The modern church has turned the focus and gifts of the saints onto itself. The church is consuming them as it seeks to grow itself.

With leadership defined by gifting and the task defined as equipping, what should the church do when it meets? Throughout the book of Acts we see many of the things that the church did as a part of its daily life. I will list some along with the chapter where it is referenced. Acts 2 contains descriptions of the following: they preached the gospel, baptized, taught and learned, ate together, had fellowship, shared their possessions as need arose, and praised God. In Acts 4, the apostles collected the money and distributed it as they saw fit. In Acts 5, they are healing those with unclean spirits. In Acts 6, they set up people to care for the widows. In Acts 12, the church intercedes for Peter in prayer. In Acts 13, the church fasted, prayed, laid hands on and sent out

missionaries to spread the Gospel. In Acts 14, elders were appointed.

So let's condense this. The early recording of church practice includes the following: preaching the Gospel, baptizing, teaching, learning, sharing, praying, fasting, praising, giving, fellowship, healing from unclean spirits, administering the care of the poor and the widows, choosing, commissioning, sending out missionaries, raising up elders, and disciplining and judging in disputes.

Those with certain spiritual gifts led the early church. The early church engaged in spiritual activities. The early church expected those in attendance to participate through the use of their spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12-13). The purpose of the church was to equip the saints for works of service. The church was to operate in such a way that it strengthened and encouraged its members. How can someone that does not possess the Spirit participate in the activities of the early church? If the church is operating as it was intended, non-believers will not fit in there. The American church has adopted a method of operation that gives place to non-believers in its midst.

## **Chapter 9: Bringing Unity Through Service to the World**

The church in America is experiencing the effects of the consumerist tactics it has employed in attempting to reach society. When the church operates in such a way that the society becomes the means by which to grow the church, then churches begin to compete for the attention of society. At the start of the reformation of theology people were given the opportunity to discuss theology in a new way. The reformation set the stage for discussions on everything from the nature of sin, to the way in which people should be baptized. Unfortunately, people decided to define themselves by their differences over such things. Movements began to follow leaders. Leaders drew followers that agreed with their points of view. New denominations were born. As the differences became more defined, the number of denominations skyrocketed.

One of the things the Church Growth Movement and the Seeker Sensitive Movement have been able to accomplish is to unite a diverse group of different theologies around common practices. If these practices were founded on Scripture, I would say we were on the right track. It amazes me that people that cannot agree on baptism, communion, and spiritual gifts can somehow find themselves cooperating so vigorously when things of the world and the methods of men are introduced into the church.

Jesus makes it clear that our unity and love for each other is to be a sign to the world that we are truly God's people (John 13:35). Consumerism has created a system whereby churches compete for attendees. I regularly receive multiple mailings each year from churches that invite me to attend their services. Most of these present their churches as a unique thing that offers

me something that no other church offers. Is this really the message of unity we need to present? Upon further examination, I find that most of these churches are using the same approach to ministry. Are we so naïve to think that unbelievers will not see this similarity? What image does it portray when the church says it is unique and actually it operates in the same way as the other churches that also claim to be unique? What message does it send when we emphasize our differences in an effort to attract unbelievers to our church?

Where can we find unity in a Biblical way? If denominations have set their existence on the doctrinal differences between them, then how can we unite the people of God again? One way would be to unite around the basic fundamental truths of Scripture. Since Christians debate and separate over such things as communion, baptism, and spiritual gifts, it is unlikely that we will unite around these things in the future. It will be a great display of God's power should that happen. We should always seek to overcome these differences. It is more likely that we can unite in serving humanity.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a movement became popular in America to bring Christian ethics to poor areas. This movement became known as the Social Gospel Movement and united many different denominations around the theme of social justice. The movement had a strong influence of post-millennialism and thereby caused many conservative denominations to avoid it. One thing we did learn from the Social Gospel Movement, is that Christians from varying denominations with different theological views could come together in cooperative efforts to care for the poor and share the Gospel.

The effects of the Social Gospel Movement are still felt today. It laid a foundation for the civil rights movement. Many of the works that still minister in the

poorest areas of our nation's cities were a result of this movement or the groups that started during this time. Is it possible that a return to a form of social gospel could unite God's people around common goals? I think we must examine the way the church was designed to operate and apply those principles to the issues of today.

The Social Gospel turned resources towards the poor areas of our country. During the later years of this movement we saw a large exodus from the same areas. After World War II people were leaving the inner cities of America for the suburbs. What has been labeled as "white flight" was leaving areas devastated with dropping property values and lower tax bases. The current condition of our inner cities in America is proof that it takes more than money to fix these problems.

The coming generation will need to take a hard look at the patterns of behavior of previous generations. It will need to assess the approaches they took to solving these problems and see which were of man and which were of God. The coming reformation will lead with disciples that are willing to relocate and spread the Gospel. It will require Christians to engage in the process of restoring the land that the locusts of Joel 2 have eaten. In an age of declining church attendance and shrinking donations, the church must find its way back to the simple Gospel and God-given methods that have changed the world. The New Reformation Movement will require a missionary approach to America's inner cities. It will require missionaries to be sent out to live, work, and minister in these devastated areas.

These new missionaries must be taught a new "old" way of church. They must assume personal responsibility for making disciples and teaching them to obey. They must teach their disciples to make other disciples. We must gather the body in a way that does not consume our time and our resources. We must return to a

place where church is the gathering of believers. When our focus is changed to one of transforming the world instead of growing a church, then our message will regain its power in the society.

We must overcome our fear. We have allowed the enemy to sow seeds of fear into our church leadership and the members. The leaders fear releasing ministry. They fear that unity will require compromise. They fear that they will lose control, when in reality, they never had control. The members fear for their lives. I minister in an inner city area of St. Louis. Many people in the suburbs tell me I am crazy to go down “there.” They claim it is not safe. The truth is that I have met many wonderful people in this neighborhood. I have never felt in danger while I was there. God is my protection no matter where He sends me to minister.

One thing that prevents us from pursuing this new form of social gospel is the pursuit of money. Many in the church today are pursuing money. God has clearly told us that we can only serve one master. The choice He gave was God or mammon. Did Jesus really mean it when He told us to deny ourselves and follow Him? Are we serious about serving the poor? Our actions will speak louder than our words and each of us will stand and give an account.



## **Chapter 10: Changing the Church Starts with Changing You**

The prophet Isaiah received an odd instruction when he was appointed to go. We see it in Isaiah 6:9-10

"Go, and tell this people: Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

Isaiah responds with the question "Lord, how long?" Ask yourself this question "Has that time ended for you?" Is today the day you hear the Lord and return to be healed? If you are hearing His voice you may be asking, "Now what?" If you are asking that question then something has connected with you. What is a person to do when they find themselves trapped in traditions, that are the invention of men, that they have believed were the instruction of God? Isn't that exactly the same question that faced those in the first century when they heard Jesus' message? Colossians 2:8 stands as a warning to you.

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ."

Is it possible you have been taken captive by the traditions of men? There is one way to know for sure. Pursue Christ!

There is a natural reaction to this message. When I speak of the church in these terms, many may think I have given up on the church. Remember God's definition of the church. It is not the institutional forms we see in America today. God sees all believers bound together in the Spirit as the Church. I am not asking you to give up on the Church. I am asking you – the Church – to get free from the structures and control of man that has bound you in stagnation. I am asking you to give up on man's control and methods for operating the church. Am I asking you to give up on or leave the Church of God? I certainly am not. The Church of God is alive and well as long as it pursues Christ! When we reach a place where men have led us this far off course then there is only one thing left to do, and that is to call out the remnant!

Who is the remnant? The remnant is the portion of God's people that He preserves for such a time as this. In Isaiah's day He had a remnant that had not bowed the knee to Ba'al. In Jesus' day the remnant was called out to pursue Christ in the New Covenant. In Martin Luther's day the remnant started the Protestant Reformation. In our day the remnant is being called out to pursue Christ and experience the faith they read about in the Bible. It is time to throw off the shackles of control and the bondage of the institution.

We are we being called out from the corrupted institutional form that has captured the church. We are we being called out to be the separate holy assembly of those whose names are written in the Book of Life! Let me recap this for you. Under the Law, only those in the covenant were allowed in the assembly. After Christ this never changed. There is no New Testament teaching that allows unbelievers to participate in the worship gathering. The instructions for the church make it necessary that you possess the Holy Spirit in order to participate. The

practice of allowing unbelievers in the worship gathering must be stopped.

There is nothing we are entangled in that is outside the power of Christ. If we seek to consecrate ourselves and to throw off any bondage, then Christ will be faithful to free us. You have nothing to fear and no risk to your eternal soul. If your salvation is founded in Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone, then there is nothing of man required in order to keep it.

The simplicity of the Gospel remains for us today. Man has made church into an extravagant affair that is costly and complicated. The structure of the American church is killing the transformational power of the church. God designed the church to be so simple that anyone could understand it. Man has set over it traditions of control and division that need to be destroyed. What will remain is the vibrant organic Spirit-filled remnant of believers that God will use to transform the world. Are you ready to be that remnant? The gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Hell's gates are a defensive weapon. They protect the strongholds of Satan. Its time for the church to get out of its walls and again go kick down some gates. The first step is to fall on your face before God. We must seek the truth with a humble heart. Ask God to teach you the things He desires you to do. The Holy Spirit was sent to us to be our teacher and guide (John 14:26, 16:13).

Within this work is found the history of how many things have changed in the church over time. You can examine your own traditions and seek the wisdom of God regarding them. This work contains the process by which you can examine your life and seek to be consecrated before God. You can understand how the enemy operates. You can throw off all of the lies of the devil. You can embrace spiritual disciplines and go and make disciples. As you do this, you will gather with the disciples and God

calls that the church. When you gather you can focus on following God's instructions and listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We do not need to hold to traditions just because men tell us they have the authority of God. If this were true, then the Apostles would have never moved out from under the Jewish leaders. Martin Luther would never have left the leadership of the Catholic Church or opposed the papacy. The truth is that many of the things that the church is supposed to do are hindered by the way it currently does things. Very few disciples are being made. Very few people are being disciplined. Many have never discovered their spiritual gifts or had the privilege of using them the way they were intended. For many people church has been reduced to a one or two day a week event that resembles a theatrical presentation. It is no wonder so few Christians have found that free and abundant life that Christ speaks of in John 10:10.

The Christian faith was meant to be a life of relationship with our Creator. Our Creator is a supernatural being. This means the Christian life is meant to be a life of supernatural experience. The price has been paid in full. God came to earth as a man, he suffered and died, so you can have life. Do not settle for less. The choice is yours.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Disciple Driven Church**

Web Site – <http://www.discipledrivenchurch.org>

Blog – <http://discipledrivenchurch.blogspot.com>

### **Sun Ministries**

Web Site – <http://www.sunministries.org>

Blog – <http://sunministries.blogspot.com>

### **The Isaiah 61 Initiative**

Web Site – <http://www.isaiah61initiative.org>

### **The following resources are available –**

3-week Inner City missions training on location in St. Louis Missouri

Dr. Terry Goodwin is available for a limited number of speaking engagements. He does not charge for speaking engagements and is available as long as funds to cover the expenses for these engagements are available.

Isaiah 58 prayer and fasting on the first Sunday of each month. Have your group join groups from across America in fasting and praying for revival and reformation in America.

For more information on any of these resources contact [terry@sunministries.org](mailto:terry@sunministries.org)