



WHY DO YOU GO TO CHURCH?

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Dedicated to:

Doug Hodges
Max Rogers

who asked the question and inspired me to write this
book.

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Introduction

Most Christian believers know that they need to go to church, and if they are asked why, they will likely quote the Scripture, *"not forsaking the fellowshiping of ourselves together"* (Hebrews 10:25). But if you ask them why they go to church, they may be a bit vague about their reasons. They may tell you things like, "fellowshipping with other Christians", "hearing the preaching", "worshipping God", "obeying the Scripture", etc. All these are viable reasons why people say they **should** attend church.

There are people who attend church out of a sense of **duty**, and others go to church because they get a lot of **joy and pleasure** out of it.

There is a principle where people are **bonded into** a particular church. There are many who go to a church of a particular denomination because they believe that the articles of faith and the style of church government is the most appropriate for their particular "flavour" of religious observance; but many more people report that their church is their **family** and that the people they fellowship with are like brothers and sisters to them. To emphasize this, there are fellowships where people refer to their fellow church members as "brother" so and so or "sister" so and so. They may call their pastor, "Brother ___", while more formal churches may refer to their ministers as "Reverend" or "Pastor".

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This is not to say that all these reasons are not valid, or that church members who attend church for these reasons are of less quality than others.

The purpose of this book is to examine more deeply about why **you** go to church, and what you hope to **achieve** by attending the particular church you go to. There are no right or wrong answers here that anyone could point the finger at another person and say, "You are attending church for the wrong reasons", or that "I am a better Christian because I have stronger reasons for my attendance at church than you have."

What we want to present in this book are principles and ideas that might stimulate your thinking about why you attend church, and what you hope to achieve from it. You might feel that you are satisfied with the direction you are going, or that you might want to achieve more in your Christian experience than you are at present. What has started me off thinking about this topic was when I overheard one of the members of my own church asking, "Why am I coming to church?" He was asking this question out of a concern that all he seemed to be doing when he came to church was to just **sit in a pew**, and this was unacceptable to him. But the following weekend, I was at a Gospel Faith Messenger Prophetic Equipping meeting, when one of the senior participants asked us, "**Why do you attend church?**" It seemed significant to me that I heard basically the same question asked in two quite different environments.

So, the question is a challenging one that is designed to make us think more deeply and carefully about why we attend church, or go to prayer meetings, Bible studies, or Prophetic Equipping meetings. This is what we are attempting to do, **to stimulate thought and discussion** about why we attend church meetings and how we can use our attendance to more effectively do the will of God in our involvements and activities.

The Early Church

We can get a view of the way believers participated in the early church by examining some of the references in the Book of Acts.

We see first that ***"the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"*** (Acts 2:47). This shows us that the initial motivation for people to join the Christian Church was that people got saved and felt the need to join up with others who had the same experience of salvation as they did. Also, they felt the need for further foundational teaching on what was happening to them. Salvation through Jesus Christ was a totally new experience and, because the first Christians were Jews, there was a transition from Judaism with its observance to the Law to a new freedom through unmerited grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

The Acts description of the activities of the early Church describes them as follows: ***"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart"*** (Acts 2:46).

It seems that the main activity of the early Church in its infancy was that believers met together and shared meals together. There seems to be an absence of anything like a formal programme in how they fellowshiped together. The emphasis was having the joy and pleasure of being with other believers, meeting together informally. It is possible that the emphasis at that time was preaching the Gospel and getting people saved, and the Apostles were satisfied for the

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present to just have new believers fellowshiping together and enjoying each others' company.

It could very well be that these informal meetings were happening alongside their continued worshipping as Jews in the Temple, and the Christian fellowship meetings were like our home group gatherings. The transition from their familiar mode of worship according to the Mosaic Law to a new way of worship through Christ may have taken some time, and the separation of the two may have been forced on the Christian believers because of persecution by the Jews. In fact, many Jewish Christians from Jerusalem were scattered all around the different regions because of the intense persecution that took place after the martyrdom of Stephen. Jewish worship in the regions outside Jerusalem and Judaea took place in the synagogues, and the Jewish Christians would have continued their worship in the synagogues for some time during the transition. The transition may have been completed on AD70 when the Temple and the Jewish system of worship was destroyed by the Romans. After that event, and the conversion of Gentiles and their entry into the Church, it is probable that Jewish and Gentile Christians fellowshiped together as a separate church entity.

There is another gathering that comes to mind, and this was when Peter was imprisoned by Herod (Acts 12:4). The believers had gathered together to pray for Peter, that God would keep him safe (Acts 12:12). So, here we have another reason why groups of believers met together: prayer.

There is another reference to when a group of believers met together for prayer in the face of intense persecution. It is very interesting to see what they prayed about: ***"On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. '...Now, Lord, consider their***

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threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:23-31).

Notice that this group of believers is still concentrating on preaching the Gospel more than wanting God to meet their own personal needs. They pray that they be given more boldness to preach the Word, and that their preaching be confirmed with signs and wonders. This is a prayer that God responded to immediately.

There is an instance where the group of believers met together to hear teaching from Paul (Acts 20:8). This meeting went right into the late hours because the believers were hungry for the teaching that Paul was giving at that time. This shows that early church believers met together to receive teaching and training in the things of God. This was a time when the new churches needed a foundation of sound doctrine, and this was what Paul provided to them.

So far we see that the early church met together for informal fellowship around communal meals, prayer, and teaching, and these three did not necessarily happen at the same time. There is no mention of any formal “services” with a programme. In fact, we have not been able to find anything like that mentioned anywhere in the Book of Acts to describe how early church believers assembled together.

We see that they met in private homes (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15). Venues like this are well-known for the informal nature of meetings held there.

The place where Paul gave his all-night teaching session was an upper room. It may have been part of someone’s home, or it may have been a room rented for the purpose.

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The only other places Christians went were to the Jewish synagogues (Acts 17:17, Acts 13:14, Acts 19:8). The purpose for going to the Synagogue was to share the Gospel, not to join in with the formalized worship there.¹

When we go further into the apostle Paul's teaching about the activities of the church, we find a wealth of information. Let's look at a few references:

"How is it then, brethren? When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

This describes what Paul taught about what should be happening when believers gather together in fellowship. Our guess is that as the early church became more organized, the fellowship gatherings took on a format where believers were encouraged, comforted and built up in their faith. The elders were the facilitators, and every member was encouraged to join in with the Spiritual ministry. The guiding principle was that whatever was said and done in a fellowship meeting, it had to build up the others. Notice that the ministry is directed toward each other.

What seems to be missing is any sort of organized "worship" time where believers turned their attention from each other and spent time worshiping God directly. This seems strange to us because in many churches, the worship times, when hearts are directed to God, are highly valued. But Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, seems to discourage public worship of God, especially in the use of tongues, because his concern was that when the believers gathered together, they needed to build up each other. Thus, when believers say

¹ See my previous paragraph about Jewish Christians continuing to worship at the Temple and synagogues during the transition phase before the destruction of the Temple in AD70.

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that they go to church in order to “worship God”², are they being consistent with New Testament principles of corporate fellowship?

I must admit that the Book of Psalms is full of encouragement for groups of people to lift their hands and worship God³, as well as the use of musical instruments and dancing as part of their worship. It is quite possible that the Christian Church did worship God in that fashion, but actual references to it are strangely missing in the Book of Acts, unless someone can find references that I have not thought of. But we must remember that Jewish worshipers perceived God as a separate entity who dwelt in the Temple. New Testament believers, after the Day of Pentecost have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, making their own bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit, so the emphasis seems to have changed from worshipping an entity outside of ourselves, to obeying the moving and prompting of the Holy Spirit to edify others in the gathering.

We also see corporate worship of God in the Book of Revelation, but we are looking into the future when the Church is made perfect and we are seeing Jesus Christ face to face. It may be that while the harvest of souls is white and our attention is directed toward saving souls for Christ, that corporate worship of God and Jesus Christ is kept for when our salvation is complete and we are in glory with Him.

But I am not proposing this as a doctrine, but offering these thoughts as discussion points from my observation of fellowship practice as described in the Book of Acts as a background to the purpose of this book – to have an clearer

² See Appendix 1 for my definition of New Testament worship.

³ See the references to the lifting up of hands in worship in Appendix 1.

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understanding of how the early church fellowshiped together and what they got up to in their meetings.⁴

What we have discovered is that when the early church came together, it was for very practical purposes: To enjoy meeting other believers, to pray that God would give them boldness to preach the Gospel and to back up that preaching with signs and wonders, to give and receive teaching on Christian doctrine, and to allow the Holy Spirit to move in and through them to bring prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, discernment of spirits, healing, miracles, extraordinary faith, etc., all for the purpose of building up and strengthening the church. By the time all this happened in Christian meetings, there wasn't time for much else.

⁴ There are episodes where believers were praising and magnifying God, and the most prominent place is on the Day of Pentecost when the 120 were baptized in the Spirit and were heard speaking in tongues and magnifying God in the languages of all the regions around and about.

The Church As A Body

Paul compares the church to the human body. As the human body has different functioning parts to enable it to remain healthy and functioning, so the church is made up of different parts. As the human body parts are diverse, one not being the same as another (even the ears and eyes are different to each other, and fulfill slightly different functions, even if they look as though they do the same job, the right eye and ear works in tandem with the left eye and ear to provide the complete function for which they are designed.

In the same way, a church may have two evangelistic ministries, but each operating in different parts of the region. There may be different pastoral roles, i.e.: one for old folks, another for youth, and yet another for young married adults, etc.

If we first look at the head, we see that it contains the brain, eyes, ears, and mouth. If we compare the human head to the leadership of the church, we see that the brain compares to the board of elders who govern the different functions of the church. It co-ordinates the functions and duties of the rest of the body. The eyes compare to the vision of the church, and the monitoring of the direction of the church to ensure that it is moving in the right direction. The ears compare to those in the church who are listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church, and the mouth compares to the preaching of the Gospel, the gift of prophecy, and other verbal ministry designed to uplift, comfort, and encourage the congregation members.

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The arms represent the practical working of the church. These are compared to the deacons whose role is to look after the building maintenance, repairs, making sure the bills are paid, etc.

The legs represent the carrying out of the governance policies of the elders and they move the church in the direction that the "brain" determines it should go.

Let's look at the body when things go wrong with it. If the brain is damaged, then the thinking processes are interrupted. If the governing elders are dysfunctional through internal arguments, lack of respect for fellow elders, one elder thinking he is closer to God than others, etc., all the other functions of the church are adversely affected. The eyes cannot see straight, the ears hear strange voices, and the mouth starts speaking false doctrine and nonsense. This in turn causes the legs to move the church in a wrong direction, and the arms expending effort that is wasted trying to maintain a church that is not fulfilling its purpose.

If the eyes go blind, although the brain is fully functional, it cannot determine what the vision of the church is any longer. This is when churches lose their original prophetic vision which is the foundation for why they were set up. Everything else may be working perfectly, but without the appropriate vision, the church is doomed to failure like a sinking ship with its engine and propellers going at full speed, except in this case the engine and propellers are driving it more quickly to the bottom of the sea.

If the ears go deaf, the facility for hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit is lost, and this opens the way for false doctrine to enter in, and the church fumbles around trying to achieve the best it can; but without the leading of the Holy Spirit, it cannot find its way through the minefield and eventually blows apart as it steps on a spiritual mine put in front of it by the devil.

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It is quite obvious to know what will happen to the church without its "arms" or "legs". What happens is that it may have all its doctrines correct, have the right prophetic vision, hearing from the Holy Spirit, but nothing is actually done. The maintenance of the church buildings and equipment falls behind and the church ends up looking shabby, unkempt, and gets into serious debt because the bills are not paid.

If the legs become non-functional, then no matter what the brain decides, the eyes see, the ears hear or the mouth speaks, nothing will get done because there is nothing to motivate any actual movement or action. It will be like the head mechanic getting all the other mechanics together each morning, bringing out the service manuals, and having theory sessions on how to fix motor-cars, but that is all that happens. No-one gets around to actually going out and fixing any motor cars. Isn't that what happens in many churches today? Sunday after Sunday, the minister preaches sermons and chairs "strategic" planning meetings about how we should move the church "forward" to where that might be, and yet time passes by and nothing gets done. This is what happens when the only functioning part of the church "body" is the head with the legs paralyzed.

At this stage, let's unpack Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 concerning the Church as a body:

"Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many."

This shows that the church has many parts, and when those parts are fitted together, they form one combined body. The life-giving heart of the body is the Holy Spirit. He co-ordinates the different parts of the body to function as a corporate unit. There is no distinction between race,

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denomination or social status. What binds the body together is the Holy Spirit. Because there is only one Holy Spirit, there is a unity in all the different parts of the body.

"Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

Each part of the body has a function. It is placed into the right position in the body in relation to the others. Each part, big or small, prominent or hidden, are all essential parts of the body. The foot has a particular function, different from the hand, but as we have previously seen, both are essential for the effective working of the body. Because it would be ridiculous for the foot to say that it is not part of the body because it is not the hand, so it is equally ridiculous for the church treasurer to say he is not part of the body of Christ because he is not the preacher. In the same way, a person whose role is to wait before God and listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church cannot say he is not part of the body because he does not see visions or have a clear vision of the direction in which the church should be heading.

The body is not made up of just one part. Paul is taking a common-sense approach in that one cannot imagine the human body being made up of just an eye, or an ear. Just imagine a great big eye walking around. Wouldn't we think that aliens have landed at last? So, if the whole church was made up of visionaries, there would be chaos because there would be no "listeners" to hear the voice of God giving

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counsel and guidance. In the same way, if the church was made up of just "listeners", there would be no "sniffers", or discerners of spirits to sniff out what the devil is trying to do so that weapons can be used against him.

The fact is, that as God has placed the different parts of the human body in the places He wants them to be, so He has placed the different parts of the body of Christ where He wants them to be. It is then up to church leaders to discover the different functions of the body in their churches. If they do not, and treat their church as if it was just a head and nothing else, as Paul says, **"Where is the body?"** then we would wonder if that church is really functioning as part of the body of Christ as God intends it to be. One could go further and ask whether such a dysfunctional church is actually part of the body of Christ! That might provide some answers as to why some churches never achieve New Testament results. It may be that they are not New Testament churches.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it."

As one part of the body cannot say that it is not part of the body because it is not the same as another part, so, one part of the body of Christ cannot say to another part that he is not needed because he does not perform the same function. For example, following Paul's picture of the human

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body, the visionary cannot say that he does not need the practical person in the church because the latter does not have the same vision for the church. Often, the practical-minded members of the church are fairly "down to earth" people who are more skillful at fixing and maintaining equipment and buildings than getting into the finer points of Christian doctrine, and therefore might seem less "spiritual". Conversely, the practical ones might feel that the visionaries are engaging in "flights of fancy" rather than dealing with "down to earth" issues.

Paul is making the point that there are members of the church who appear to have more honour than others, and that some Christians appear stronger than others. It is a natural tendency of human nature to hide the less presentable items away from public view. Just as there are parts of the human body that are kept private, and to have them exposed would be offensive to many people, so church leaders would want to keep the weaker members of the church out of the public arena. You will notice that many prominent "big name" ministries tend to be physically attractive, sociable people, and people are attracted to them. But if a preacher comes to town and he has a small head, big ears, a large nose, a pot tummy, and spindly legs, would he have the same attractiveness for us?

I remember a couple in a large church who were very modest in their dress, with the wife having long, unstyled hair, wearing an old-fashioned long dress. This woman happened to love the Lord, and was seen as very spiritual, which she actually was; but she was unadorned in her physical appearance. Another woman, a visitor to the church, was heard to remark with a fearful look on her face, "If I join this church, will I have to look like that?" It is significant to note that many people in this church were very concerned about their physical appearance, and I wonder if with some, Spirituality is taking second place?

I remember a visiting preacher whose ministry was very powerful, and had a major effect on our little fellowship at

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the time. He was short and crippled, getting around on crutches. I heard another powerful preacher who had cerebral palsy, and yet he preached a very encouraging and faith-building message and ended his sermon with the song, "Victory in Jesus". It is interesting that these preachers were more memorable than the many "attractive" preachers that I have listened to. There is something special about a disabled Christian who presses into God and comes out with a powerful ministry for Christ. It supports Paul's view that God gives honour to those parts of the body that seem less honourable. Who knows? That member of your church who is the powerhouse, enabling the healings and miracles coming through the ministry of the pastor, might be that little old lady with a bun and tennis shoes who lives alone but spends most of her time in prayer for the church.

It is not the Spirit of God who limits church members in their Spiritual ministries. It is mainly the fear of man. Many church ministers and pastors see their function as the "head" of the church. They say they have the governance, vision, are listening to the Spirit, and do most of the preaching. Anyone else who starts to believe that the Lord has given them a Spiritual ministry in the church and starts to exercise what they believe the Lord has given to them, comes under pressure from the "head" who, in many cases, tries to shut them down. When a significant number of church members start to exercise Spiritual ministry in the church meetings, this can bring a threat to the power and control to a minister or pastor who thinks that because he is the "head" that all the authority in the Spirit is exclusively his. It is quite significant to hear of so many ordinary Christian believers who report that they have been "slammed" by their church leadership when they have tried to exercise Spiritual ministry in faith in obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in them.

"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different

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kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:27-31).

Now Paul gets to the point. We are the body of Christ, and each one of us is a part of it. It is up to us to find our Spiritual gifting and start functioning as an effective part of the body. The minister or pastor, or even the church elders are not the body; they are parts of the body. Every member of the body has equal status before God because He is no respecter of persons. The pastor or minister has no more authority in the Spirit than the humble prayer warrior in the back room. A person whose job is the church usher is just as able to pray for the sick and see them healed as the big name healing preacher ministering to thousands in a stadium. The different ministries in the church are not levels of authority, but are roles and gifting from the Holy Spirit.

Paul specifies the parts of the body that are the most important for the successful functioning of the Church. He states that these are a team of people functioning in their Spiritual ministries in the Church. No one person can fulfill all these gifts and ministries, and many ministers and pastors are being foolish in trying to be all things to the people because they are merely setting themselves up for failure, and the failure rate of pastors is very high. Some churches are full of failed pastors and ministers who sit in their pews, ineffective and bitter because of their negative experience in the ministry. This is because many of them tried to be a "one man band" instead of following Paul's guidelines about the need to encourage and equip the church members to discover and fulfill their Holy Spirit ministries.

Not all can be the pastor, preacher, or the church elder, but any person can exercise the gift of prophecy to give words of encouragement to the others, or give a word of knowledge or wisdom to strengthen and comfort others in need. Anyone can pray for the sick, although the elders of

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the church have a special role in that area (James 5:14). Anyone can witness for Christ in their community and see signs and wonders backing up the Gospel. You don't have to compare yourself with anyone else. You can press into God and find out what God has for you to do as a worker in His Church.

The key for developing a Spiritual ministry is to eagerly desire the best gift for you, and keep yourself open to the Lord to develop that calling and ministry in you.

Formalism in the Church

At some stage the church evolved from the relatively informal type of meeting described in the Book of Acts, to the more formalized structure of many of the church services we have today.

As different generations of believers came into the church, the original prophetic vision that existed with the Apostles faded and different interpretations both of Scripture and the format of church services developed. As the Church became more formalized, the spontaneity of the Spirit faded as church leaders become more confident in their planned programmes rather than the free ministry of the Holy Spirit in the services. It has been said that the reason why the Church went in the direction of an educated and trained clergy was to stop all sorts of people getting up in services and speaking false doctrine and nonsense that was destabilizing the Church. It was felt that the only way to maintain sound doctrine in the Church was to have a clergy class formally educated in the orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith. The problem with this was that it made a false division between clergy and laity and brought about the attitude among clergy that the laity was not qualified to have Spiritual ministry in the meetings. This in turn led to the "one man band" type of ministry where the clergyman conducted the services and did the ministry while the ordinary members sat passively in the body of the church.

In many churches today, especially the traditional ones, this formal division between clergy and laity still exists. We are also seeing this discrimination occurring in "Spirit-filled" churches that once had a more informal free type of service. In many of those churches that have informal home meetings, we are seeing remnants of that freedom where

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ordinary Christians are able to use their giftings in the Holy Spirit.

So, this is a thumbnail sketch of the background. It is not an exhaustive study of the reasons why the Church has become what it is today,⁵ but it gives us enough to think and pray careful about what our role should be in the Church.

⁵ There are some excellent studies on the nature and character of the Christian church, as well as the development of the church throughout history. The reader is directed to those studies if he or she wants a deeper understanding.

The Role of Church Leaders

At this point, we want to spend a little time examining the role of church leaders as they are described in the New Testament, as compared to what is actually happening in churches today.

The ministry of the Church is divided up into a five-fold structure: ***"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers"*** (Ephesians 4:11).

Apostles were those who were sent out to build churches in places where there were originally no Christians. The modern equivalent is the Christian missionary who goes to different countries to preach the Gospel and to plant churches.

Prophets were those who had the role of hearing what the Holy Spirit was saying to the churches and to faithfully communicate the will of God to them.

Evangelists were those whose role is to preach the Gospel and to win people to Christ. This was different from the Apostle in that the evangelist was part of the ministry of the local church and the involvement was on "home ground".

Pastors were those who looked after the fellowship of believers and facilitated the running of the fellowship gatherings. Their role was to visit and encourage church members.

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Teachers were those who gave doctrinal and Spiritual teaching to congregation members.

Because there was no such thing as a formal “clergy” in the early church, the Apostle who planted the church, gave the foundational ministry until there were others who showed by their maturity and gifting that they could be appointed as elders. These elders could minister in any of the other four types of ministry, as their giftings came through the Holy Spirit.

So, in the fellowship gatherings, the elders conducted the ministry according to their giftings, and fostered other members of the congregation to exercise the gifts of the Spirit. Paul gives a good picture of how a service conducts itself in 1 Corinthians 14.⁶

What is happening now in many churches is that the “Pastor” is trying to be the five ministries on his own, and the elders of the church are relegated to a “governmental” role in that they do not take an actual part in the Spiritual ministry of the meetings, but have a separate monthly meeting to discuss policy and pastoral issues.

The modern day deacons are those who look after the practical functions of the church, and are merely “caretakers” who make sure that the bills are paid, door locks work, and there is enough toilet paper in the rest room. The experience of a deacon having a Spiritual ministry like Stephen (Acts 6:8), or Philip (Acts 8:5) is foreign to the role in our modern church. Even many church elders don’t have that role, whereas in the early Church, it was the elders who headed up the Spiritual ministry of the Church!

We are not “knocking” the necessity and usefulness of a ministry that is educated and trained in sound doctrine. This is an important role in the Church; but the trained person is not of a higher status than any of the other elders. One

⁶ I will unpack that chapter in Appendix 2.

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church system has a “teaching elder” (the formal minister), and “ruling elders” who are not expected to do any teaching or have a Spiritual ministry in the church. The New Testament does not recognize this. The New Testament elder is both a governor of the Church and has a Spiritual ministry based on the particular role within the five-fold ministry to the Church.

The New Testament supports “bishops” or “overseers”. These are not the Bishops that we see in Roman Catholic or Anglican churches. The New Testament bishop was an elder of the Church and along with his particular ministry gift, could have pastoral responsibility over a number of churches, such as Timothy, or the Apostle John. But this was not a position of authority as present day bishops are. It was an encouragement and equipping role, not a power and control function. The church elders did not have to answer or report to the New Testament bishop. They viewed him as a mentor and resource person.

Paul had to encourage Timothy to perform his role confidently in spite of his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). Paul had appointed him as bishop or overseer of a number of churches, but Timothy was being intimidated because he was quite young for the role, but Paul told him: ***“God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind”*** (1 Timothy 1:7). It is not about how old a person is, or how educated, but his Spiritual maturity in the Lord. Paul recognized Spiritual maturity in Timothy and appointed him to a responsible position in the churches because of that.

More could be said here, but this is enough to give a picture of the comparison between the early New Testament Church and our modern church. It is in the context of our modern church that we have to find our gifting and our function in the will of God for us. So, what we need is to find a way of functioning in the existing church, but with our mind oriented to the New Testament way of Christian ministry.

Why Do People Go to Church?

When we talk with people about why they go to church, we get answers like, "to worship God", "to hear the Gospel", "to get my needs met", "get training in doctrine", "to preach the Gospel to others", "to pray and minister to others", "to reach out into the community and lead others to Christ", "to be involved in leadership", "to be a deacon and look after the practicals", etc., etc. As we have said before, there is no "right or wrong" answer to this.

What we want to encourage people to believe is that everyone has a Spiritual ministry. Romans 12:6 says: ***"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, [let us prophesy] according to the proportion of faith."*** Not everyone has the same gift or ministry, but there is something wrong when no one has a Spiritual ministry except the minister or pastor. It is doubly wrong when someone is an elder of a church and does not know what his Spiritual ministry is.

If a person's reason for going to church is to hear the Gospel, learn the first principles of Christian faith, getting baptized in the Holy Spirit, get their needs met (as a primary motive), or repenting afresh each Sunday for the sins committed during the week, then they are still at the "milk" stage of faith. ***"For every one that uses milk [is] unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe."*** (Hebrews 5:13), ***"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able [to bear it], neither yet now are ye able"*** (1 Corinthians 3:2).

The main characteristic of "milk" Christians is that they concentrate on getting more than giving. They are the ones

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who are content to sit passively in services, soaking up the preaching Sunday after Sunday, but are unable to contribute anything back to the congregation by way of Spiritual ministry. After years of that, they become "sermon hardened" because they are hearing the same thing over and over again that they have been hearing for years. They have arrested their Spiritual development through passivity.

The "milk" Christian can easily be observed going up the front Sunday after Sunday for personal ministry, but not seeming able to grow as a result of it. It seems that they are going back and back for their spiritual⁷ "fix" so they can get through the following week until next Sunday. They are also the ones that take up most of the church counselor's time and who make themselves dependent on the counselor to the point where the counselor has that familiar sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach when he sees the person approaching.

The "milk" Christian is always concerned about their spiritual state and their standing with God. He or she seems to have a spiritual "low self-esteem" when it comes to approaching God.

The mature or "meat" Christian is quite different. He or she concentrates more on giving than getting. This involves a complete dependence on Christ, using ministry giftings to give Spiritual blessing to others, is able to train and teach others in the faith, is able to preach the Word with signs following, and is recognized and commissioned as a leader in the Christian faith. He has moved beyond the first principles of the faith: ***"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the***

⁷ When we use the small 's' for spiritual, we are not referring to the Holy Spirit working within the believer. When we talk about Spiritual ministry and experience, we use the capital 'S' to denote the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer.

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foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God" (Hebrews 6:1).

So, the "milk" Christian goes to church to **get**.

The "meat" Christian goes to church to **give**.

What type of Christian are you?

For a young Christian (novice), still in apprenticeship, the "milk" stage is part of his or her normal development in faith. There is nothing wrong with that. But for a church member who has been attending church for many years, and is still at the same stage of development as they were when they first joined the church, there is something sadly amiss. They have arrested development and this is certainly not normal. But it is sad that the vast majority of passive churchgoers are at this level. This is not normal and change is desperately needed.

What Causes Arrested Development?

There are a number of things which we have observed in Christians that suggest that these ones are suffering from Arrested Development. What we intend is to list some of these problems and a suggested remedy for them.

Many Christians are in the endless loop of sinning and repentance. During the week, they are conscious of the times they commit sins, and then come and repent on Sunday morning. Then the following week they go through the same cycle again of sinning, having a bad conscience and going through the throes of repentance once again. This carries on week after week for years in some cases. This hinders any Spiritual development or usefulness in the ministry.

The remedy is to understand fully what Jesus did for us on the Cross. When we gave our lives to Christ, the guilt and punishment of our sin was completely removed and forgotten about by God. When Jesus sacrificed His blood in the heavenly holy of holies, it happened once only. There is no longer any need for repeated sacrifices for sin.⁸ We can go on and work for the Lord in our giftings as though there is no sin that would hinder us. This is because there actually is no sin to hinder us because we have been cleansed from all unrighteousness.

⁸ Read my book "Where Do You Stand With Christ?" available on the book table of **some** of our GFM Prophetic Equipping meetings.

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The next problem is defective faith. We need to start believing the Word of God about ourselves. Too often we have a stronger belief in our shortcomings and failures and allow them to determine our effectiveness in Christ. ***"Without faith it is impossible to please God"*** (Hebrews 11:6). ***"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith"*** (1 John 5:4). Faith is not a feeling or a sensation. Faith is believing what the Word of God says about our standing with God and trusting completely in Christ to honour His Word.

The next issue to confront is defective ministry. This often happens in "one man band" churches where the minister exercises power and control and keeps the congregation limited to passivity by teaching them (mostly by implication) that they do not have the authority to exercise Spiritual ministry and that only trained clergy can do it. Congregation members are blocked from exercising the gifts of the Spirit because either the minister does not believe that the gifts are for today, or that they are just "optional extras" that can be used or ignored; usually they are ignored. Another example of a defective ministry is the pastor who is unable to train and equip his congregation even though he might believe in the gifts and ministries of the Spirit. The result in those churches is that there is one performer at the front and a church full of pew sitting "wooden Indians".

The remedies for this are, that the believer can leave that church and go to another one down the road that will equip him for Spiritual ministry; or he can stay in the church and work on the minister to remind him of God's Word and encourage him or her to stir up the gift within and assist others to do the same; or stay with the church; make no further effort in the church, but get involved in cross-denominational ministries that support the equipping of ordinary Christians to stir up their gifts and involve themselves in Spiritual ministry.

The believer is "needs oriented" in that he or she cannot break the cycle of being so aware of personal needs that so

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much time is spent trying to meet them that any Spiritual ministry is choked. This is the person who goes up on every altar call to receive ministry time after time. The person spends a lot of time weeping under prayer because his or her own sense of need is overwhelming his heart and spirit. There is nothing wrong with having a sense of need from time to time. We all do, but getting ministry should resolve the need and bring about Spiritual growth. Having to receive repeated ministry for the same need can be linked to defective faith.

The remedy is for the person to concentrate on the Scriptures that encourage faith – believing the promises of God and trusting in Christ. Having defective faith and being “needs oriented” can come from unbelief, and this may need to be repented of, or the person even having to have deliverance to break a spirit of unbelief and fear away from him. Once a person has been set free of the bondage of needs orientation, he can then see the needs of others and to start ministering to them. Then he will start to see his Spiritual ministry developing at last.

Why Do YOU Go To Church?

We have now arrived at the point where we need to gather all this together and look at why **you** go to church, and to determine whether your church and its leadership needs to change, or whether it is **you** who needs to change either **your direction** in the Holy Spirit, or the **type of church** you would feel happier and more fulfilled in attending.

So, let's look at some of the reasons why you go to church. Now, as before, we are not making a judgment about your reasons for attending church, because most of the reasons are quite valid and do not present a problem to the Holy Spirit. What is important, and determines whether you are moving with the Spirit or quenching Him, is **what you do** while participating (or not) in the services. Jesus, in His evaluation of the seven churches in Revelation 2:29, does not go into the reasons why Christians are going to church, but examines their works; in other words, what they are doing as part of the Church. He sees the Church, not as the building or the organization, but as the people who are in it. **"I know your works"** (Revelation 2:21).

But we think that the **reasons why** we go to church often **determines what we do there**, and, because we are part of the invisible Church, what we do when we are not participating in church services is also significant, for example, our conduct at home, at work, in social situations.

So, if your motivation for going to church is to **worship God**, then you may be more vocal in your praises to God,

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look forward to the times when you all stand up to sing, lift up your hands, praise the Lord, dance, or whatever you do during the "worship time". You might not get so much out of the church notices, the Scripture readings, or the sermon if it goes too long. But when they have prayers as part of the service, you then feel more involved. Over all, your heart and faith is directed more to your perception of the person of God than the issues surrounding others in the congregation. You are more likely to want to attend the church prayer meeting than the Bible study, except if the theme of the study is in the book of Psalms, which is the God-worshipping part of the Bible. The type of church that you would feel more happier? and fulfilled in would be where the services include a long, expressive, free worship time when you can lift your heart up to God in praise and worship, both with your understanding and with the Spirit.

If your motivation for attending church is to **increase your Bible knowledge** then you will be more likely to be a part of a church that has the preaching ministry the main part of the service. You might feel like a "fish out of water" in a church that spends a lot of time in free, unstructured worship. While others are lifting their hearts and praising God in voice and song, you are waiting for it to finish so the pastor can get on with the sermon and you can gain some more good teaching from the Word. You are the person who is the "hard core" of the Bible study group, and you enjoy the discussions and are very stimulated by them. You enjoy the "cut and thrust" of good theological discussion, and have a dream of going to Bible College to further enhance your knowledge and perhaps be trained for a Biblical teaching ministry in the church.

Another reason for attending church is that you are interested in the **social and community** side of the church. You enjoy meeting up with others before the service, and having morning tea with fellow members afterward. If there is a community coffee morning, or a parents group, you will be there. Some churches have a "drop-in" centre in the main street of town, and this is an activity in which you

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would be involved. It is not that your commitment to Christ is any less than others, but you feel very comfortable sharing your faith over a cup of coffee during a fellowship dinner, than preaching the Gospel from the front.

There are people who go to church because they **have a sense of need** that they are seeking to have met. It may be that they have found life a lonely experience and that church members accept them as they are. There are others who are sickly, and have come to the belief that because Jesus heals the sick, they come to church to receive healing. Others need regular encouragement to battle depression, and the church offers plenty of formal and informal counseling. You will see these people go forward Sunday after Sunday at the altar call to receive ministry. Some "stronger" Christians have looked down on these people and feel that they need "more faith", but in reality it is not a permanent state, but a stage of Christian development. A person may be in conflict and full of needs right now, but given five years into the future, they may develop into the most stable and effective Christians in the church.

Another reason is that the person has a **particular set of skills** that makes him useful in the church. A person who has accounting skills becomes the treasurer; the handyman becomes a deacon, the musician becomes the pianist or organist, the singer joins the choir, the teacher is recruited for the Sunday School. Their motivation for continuing with the church is the utilization of their skills. This is still within the Spiritual ministry of the church because it is part of the ministry of administrations and helps. Much of this ministry is unglamorous and hidden, but essential nevertheless to the smooth and efficient running of the church.

A person who has a strong passion for **winning souls for Christ** will attend a church that has a good programme for preaching the Gospel to the community, running street evangelism, coffee bar ministries where people come in to hear the Gospel over a cup of coffee. He or she is more likely to be involved in an evangelistic ministry that may be

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involved in preaching the Gospel to thousands. He or she may spend much time away from the local church as part of a team going to another country to preach the Gospel, and may end up being a missionary supported by the church.

These are just some examples why people attend church, and you will see that there is a mixture of **getting** and **giving** - which leads us to our conclusion and challenge.

Getting or Giving?

So, why do YOU go to church, or attend Christian meetings like the Bible study or our GFM Prophetic Equipping meetings?

Do you go to get a blessing, ministry, or encouragement, or do you go to give ministry, encouragement or blessing to others?

Do you know what stage of development you are at in your Christian experience?

This has little to do with having years of experience in Christian involvement. It is possible for a person to be a church member for thirty years and be one year multiplied thirty times. Consequently, he or she could be just a **one-year Christian** in their Spiritual development.

Another Christian could have just three years of involvement in the things of God, and because there has been constant healthy development in their walk with God, they are actual three-year Christians and can have a more effective ministry in the Spirit than the thirty-year Christian whose development is arrested.

There are other Christians, like Timothy, who are relatively young in years, but have **a strong heritage of faith** through their parents and grand-parents that has caused them to have a maturity in the Lord well beyond their years.

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So, Christian maturity in the Spirit is not measured just in years of attending church, but in spending time learning at the feet of Christ, becoming familiar with the plans and purposes of God in His Word, and becoming experienced in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and His Gifts. A Christian who learns early to use the tools that Jesus has provided with the giving of the Holy Spirit, is a Christian who will **achieve God's results** in his ministry.

The characteristics of an immature, "milk" Christian is that he or she is still working through the first principles of repentance, getting their needs met, learning to pray and gaining a knowledge of the basics of God's Word. The immature Christian is a "sponge", soaking up knowledge, asking questions, and needing the supervision of a mentor.

So, why do you go to church? It is time to examine yourself. I can't give you the answers. This is one area in which you need to seek the Lord to find out His will for you. ***"Be not unwise but understanding what the will of God is"*** (Ephesians 5:17). It is our view that the wise Christian is one who goes to church with a giving attitude. This is more than just putting money in the offering bag. It is a believer having received Spiritual gifts, insights and revelation in the ways of God, discoveries in the Word of God through his own study and meditation, going along to church and sharing those with other believers, instead of going there just to occupy a pew.

This is what we believe is true worship. It is loving God with all our hearts, souls and minds, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. When we are sharing with others at church what we have received from the Lord, then we are going to church with the right attitude.

Appendix 1

What Is True Worship?

When someone mentions “worship” to us, we immediately think of a group of people raising their hands verbally worshiping God with hymns, spiritual songs (in tongues and English), and using expressions like “Praise God”, “Glory to God”, “Hallelujah”, etc. The traditional church idea of worship is the complete programmed service consisting of three hymns, reading, preaching and a monthly Communion service. What we need to do is to examine what the Scripture says about worship.

It is quite clear that worship in the Old Testament context consists mainly in outward observances. The Jewish Temple worship was directed toward the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, and consisted in burning animal sacrifices and verbal expressions of worship.

1 Kings 8:22: ***“And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: 23 And he said, LORD God of Israel, there is no God like You, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keeps covenant and mercy with Your servants that walk before You with all their heart: 24 Who have kept with Your servant David my father that You promisedst him: You spoke also with Your mouth, and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day.”***

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This is an example of the type of worship that was normal in the Old Testament. It is a public and verbal expression of praise to God by the king on behalf of all the people.

The Book of Psalms contains the best expressions of public worship in the Old Testament. Here are some Scriptures to illustrate the point:

Psalms 28:2: "Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto You, when I lift up my hands toward Your holy oracle."

Psalms 63:4: "Thus will I bless You while I live: I will lift up my hands in Your name."

Psalms 134:2: "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD."

Psalms 141:2: "Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."

Lamentations 3:40: "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD."

41 Let us lift up our heart with our hands [NKJV: let us lift our hearts and hands] unto God in the heavens."

The last Scripture shows that regardless of how many Jews who went away from God and worshiped idols, the standard was that when people lifted up their hands in worship to God did it with their hearts as well. The sincere Old Testament believer, who thirsted after righteousness, was not content with just doing lip-service to God. He worshiped God from his heart. So even though much of the worship of God took place in specified places (the Temple and the synagogue) and at specific times, righteousness expected the worshiper to search their hearts, test their ways to ensure that what they did was right before God, and

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then when they came to worship, they worshiped from their hearts, so that the God who looked on all men's hearts, accepted their worship.

It is interesting to note that these were people who followed the Law of Moses, and because they could never follow the Law perfectly and offered animal sacrifices for their sins, God still accepted heart-felt worship, because they offered it in faith. This shows that in all ages and dispensations, the person who came to God in faith was accepted by God in spite of his sins and shortcomings. The faith that was expressed was in the coming Messiah, although they did not know exactly who He was to be. In essence, they were lifting their hearts in faith, fully depending on the Christ to come, and Who was promised in the Scriptures to appear one day and reconcile all believers to God.

But after the Day of Pentecost there were major changes in how believers approached God. Although there are similarities between the Old Testament believers' and the New Testament Christians' approach to God, as illustrated by Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8: ***"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."*** The difference is that there is no limitation as to time and place because God is no longer limited to the Temple as far as worship is concerned.

The woman at the well in John 4:5-42, followed the Old Testament notion that God had to be worshiped in a particular place. The Samaritans had Mount Gerizim, while the Jews worshiped at Jerusalem, the location of the Temple. Jesus showed her the type of worship that was to come: ***"²¹ Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth,***

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for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴God is Spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

This shows that the worship that Jesus is talking about comes from within the believer and it is through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Jesus signals the end of the outward Old Testament style of worship, and introduces worship that any believer can do anywhere. This is because God no longer presents Himself to believers as dwelling in any particular place, but after the Day of Pentecost, God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, has come to dwell in the spirit of every believer. So now that God is actually inward instead of outward, the mode and style of worship has to change. Therefore, if a person limits his style of worship on the Old Testament model of being in a Christian "temple", then he is not worshipping ***"in Spirit and in truth"*** as Jesus presents it.

Also, another Scripture reference further establishes that there is a new temple, and this is shown in 1 Corinthians 6:19: ***"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have received from God? You are not your own";***

So, if we put these last three Scriptures together, we get a picture of how New Testament believers worship. We are worshipping God Who is here in the Person of the Holy Spirit; we do not have to worship at a particular time and place, nor do we need to worship in a particular dedicated building; we can worship anywhere we choose, and when we lift up our hands to worship, it is on the foundation of the righteousness of Christ which we have had imparted to us through the death and resurrection of Christ; and we are worshipping the God who is dwelling in us, rather than God who is outside of us. This is what we mean by worshipping God in Spirit. We are also worshipping God in reality, because worshipping God in Spirit is more true worship than worshipping outwardly to a God separate from us.

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James 1:27 tells us that ***"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."***

The King James Version uses "religion" as another word for "worship", so the reading would be that pure worship...before God consists in **what we do**. This reading mentions caring for others; in other words, loving our neighbour; and living a holy life without allowing the attitudes and corruptions of the world to defile us. This is what Jesus communicated through the Spirit to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2:23: ***"...all the churches shall know that I am He Who searches the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works."***

So, what is emerging is the realization that worship is more than just standing in church lifting up hands and making a public display of worshipping God. Jesus did not say to any of the seven churches that He saw and appreciated their "worship times". What He did comment on was what they did, both in the fellowships and how they conducted themselves in front of the unbelieving Gentiles. The proof of this is in 1 Peter 2:12: ***"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."***

So, true worship for Christian believers consists in what we do, and what we are to do is to be done in faith, because the Scriptures says ***"whatever is not of faith is sin"*** (Romans 14:3).

So when we say we are going to church to worship God, we need to think carefully about what we are going to do when we get there. Because we have shown that true worship is what we do, then the true spirit of worship consists in having an attitude of how we can give something

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of the Holy Spirit to our fellow congregational members. Paul had this attitude when he announced that he was coming to visit the Romans: ***"For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end you may be established;"*** (Romans 1:11).

Paul's intention of going to church was to give the believers there the tools and blessings that came with the Holy Spirit when He came and indwelt him. He knew that what the Holy Spirit had given him, his ministry to the churches was to share those things so that the believers would be strengthened and encouraged.

Peter and John had the same attitude in Acts 3:6: ***"Then Peter said, 'Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk'"***.

It was the miracle of the healing of the lame man that caused thousands of people to come to Christ. This is the effect of true worship that consists mainly of giving and imparting to others what the Holy Spirit has given us.

Appendix 2

Paul's Prescription for Worship in the Corinthian Church

Most of the exposition of 1 Corinthians 14 in Holy Spirit-filled circles has concentrated on the use of prophecy and tongues; but there is a background of Christian worship that can be seen in this chapter, and this is what we want to bring out here.

This chapter is one of the clearest descriptions of the type of "format" that fellowship meetings were likely to have had in order that things were done *"decently and in order"* (1 Corinthians 14:40). So we will rework the chapter with the nature of worship and fellowship that Paul favoured for Christian meetings.

The first thing that Paul says is that it is better to prophesy than to speak in unknown tongues. From a public worship perspective, the use of the gift of prophecy is the act of sharing your Spiritual gift with others, while the use of tongues is to direct personal prayer to God. Paul is saying that if a person wants to engage in personal prayer, which would not serve to build up and encourage others in the congregation, he needs to do it at home in his own private place of prayer where there is no one else to hear (or impress). Jesus was quite clear about the nature of personal prayer. He taught that when we pray, we are to go into our private place of prayer and pray in secret. If we pray in secret, God will reward us openly (Matthew 6:6).

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Paul starts of the chapter by exhorting us to ***“follow after love”*** (v1). Love is not practiced in isolation. When we love, we need to have others in mind to be successful at it. Because the Scripture says ***“he who does not love does not know God, for God is love”*** (1 John 4:8), loving others is compulsory for a holy life. God Himself is the prime example of love, and His love is expressed in what He has done for us. Therefore, following love is expressed in what we do for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This forms the basis of what we do in our worship services.

If we look at verse 6 we see that what is spoken during fellowship meetings are revelations through the Spirit in the form of words of knowledge, wisdom and discerning of spirits, sharing knowledge of God’s Word, giving prophetic words, and strengthening sound doctrine through good teaching to the believers. This is all part of true Spiritual worship. It is the act of sharing with the others what we have received from God. It is worth noting that the more time individual believers spend in private prayer, praying with the understanding and with the Spirit (tongues), the more they will have to share with the others when they come to fellowship meetings. Maybe the “wooden Indian” Christians who come to church and do nothing but sit in their pews are unable to do any better because they do not do much private praying, and therefore do not receive revelations, knowledge, prophecies or doctrine. Might not be true in all cases, but gives us food for thought. It is the experience of many believers who pray a lot in tongues in private to get revelations, words of knowledge and wisdom, prophecies, and discover new insights into God’s Word that they have much joy in sharing with others.

Also in verse 6, Paul talks about “profiting” the others. This is the result of a giving attitude. We profit ourselves by fellowshiping with God in our private prayer times, and we profit others by what we share with others in the fellowship meetings.

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In verse 12, Paul is encouraging believers to excel to the building up of the church. When we come to services and meetings with a giving attitude, and are prepared to share with others, we are playing our part in the general building up of the other believers present. Paul, in Romans 15:1 says that we who are strong ought to support the infirmities of the weak Christians among us. We have "milk" Christians in all our fellowships who need mentoring and discipling in the faith, and when we give them support and assist them to overcome their shortcomings and encourage them in their failures then we are doing something valuable that is sure to develop them into strong, fruitful Christians, who will in turn, start to be a support to new believers being added to the fellowship.

In verse 20, it is the difference between being "children" in the faith, and being "men" or Spiritual adults. Spiritual children⁹ are the ones who are always receiving, but when a believer grows in stature in the Spirit, he or she starts to be productive and fruitful, and manifests the gifts that through the measure of faith given to Him by God he is enabled to take his place in the ministry team of the fellowship.

In verse 24, although it describes the power of the gift of prophecy to draw sinners to Christ, coming into a fellowship where there is a general sharing of revelation, knowledge, Spiritual gifts, and sound doctrine has to have a major influence on them. They would be encountering a fellowship that is showing the life of Christ through the free operation of the Holy Spirit through every believer. When we are functioning in a way that frees up the Spirit to do the will of God in and through us, we show the reality of the presence

⁹ We are not talking about the childlike faith that Jesus mentions when He says that we should become like little children in the simplicity of our faith. Spiritual children need on-going support in the development of their faith and dependence on Christ. Childlike faith on the other hand exhibits a total dependence on Christ, which identifies a believer as a Spiritual "adult".

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of God with us. This is the sense in which Jesus said, ***"where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them"*** (Matthew 18:20). It is very hard to believe that the presence of Jesus can be in a service where there is a "one-man-band" performer at the front and a congregation full of pew-sitting "wooden Indians", but when the majority of believers are sharing the things of the Spirit that they have received in their private prayer time, the presence of Jesus through the working of the Holy Spirit is plainly obvious, even to sinners (who may not recognize it as such, but would know that something special is happening in that church).

This is why Jesus told John to tell the Laodicean church that it was dead, even though it had a reputation of being alive (Revelation 3:14-22). Laodicea was a rich city and the people were self-righteous in their independence. They may have been totally correct in their orthodoxy, but because they were not allowing the Holy Spirit to move freely, their orthodoxy was dead. They might have believed that the Gifts of the Spirit had ceased in their church because they had all the "t"s crossed and the "I"s dotted in the doctrine, and so they did not need the operation of the gifts anymore because they had all the revelation and teaching they needed. This is similar to those groups who maintain that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are no longer needed because the canon of Scripture has been completed and that everything of the Spirit can be gained through just the preaching and teaching of the Scripture.

So it is in verse 26 that Paul gives the general picture of what should be going on when the fellowship meets together: ***"every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edifying."***

Paul is pointing out that every single person in the fellowship, whether "milk" or "meat", Spiritual "children" or "adults", have something to share. Everyone can prophesy

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(v.31), younger Christians can give tongues messages, and mature ones can give the interpretations (as an example of the two groups working together). Anyone can suggest a song of praise, and a number of more mature Christians can share the doctrinal teaching. What is important to Paul is that whatever is done, the result should be that believers are strengthened, encouraged, exhorted and comforted. The faith of believers should be stronger at the conclusion of a fellowship meeting because of what has gone on in the meeting. The fellowship meeting is then the "springboard" for believers going out into the community and exhibiting their faith and the love of Christ in front of sinners.

In verse 37 Paul is saying that if a person thinks that they are a prophet or are Spiritual, they will acknowledge that what he is saying about what should happen in fellowship meetings are the commandments of the Lord. This makes things very serious, and it shows that the life of the Church is dependent on being faithful to the Scripture in the form of Paul's teaching.

In verse 38 he acknowledges that some are going to remain ignorant and will not take his teaching seriously. His view is that they should be left alone to remain ignorant. This has implications for churches that make their programmed services take precedence over the principles of fellowship that Paul is outlining. Paul's view is that these churches are disobeying the commandments of God by retaining a system involving one "minister" doing all the Spiritual ministry while the rest of the congregation are passive and unproductive in the services. He sees them as being ignorant of how the Holy Spirit moves, and if they will not change, then he says, let them remain ignorant, implying that it would be a waste of time and effort trying to change them unless there was a supernatural working of the Spirit in their hearts to cause them to see how far away from the true ministry of the Spirit they are.

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"Those who really love the Lord and have a genuine faith and dependence on Jesus will be teachable, and although they may be ignorant on some aspects of the ways of the Spirit, they will be open to be taught and to learn how to move and minister in the Spirit. Although it may take a lot of patience and forbearance, encouraging and exhorting these ones to stir up their gifts will never be a waste of time and effort."

Read also:

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Do You Know Where You Stand With Christ?

By Paul Christensen

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