

WHY IS MY CHURCH DYING?



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You certainly have a gift for sermon titles.

Introduction

There are many churches, especially among the traditional Protestant denomination, that are declining irrespective of the time, commitment, energy and effort that leaders and members are putting into strategic planning, constructing programmes, appointing committees and conducting evangelistic crusades. The core of faithful, committed members decreases as they age and go into retirement. Churches lose their youth and so youth programmes which are vital for the church falls into recess. Then discouragement sets in after repeated planning meetings which never really get off the ground.

The membership is further depleted through people no longer seeing the church as an effective “going concern” and leave seeking “greener pastures” elsewhere. It is disheartening for remaining members to see former members living still in the community bypassing the church in favour of churches of the same denomination in other areas of the city.

Driving through the country-side, we see derelict church buildings that once contained vibrant congregations, but as these churches have slowly died over the years, the remaining faithful few became unable to have the finance to maintain the building and surrounding property, and so the building was either sold or abandoned.

This book is a study to explore how and why a church starts to die. It looks at why prospective converts bypass the church in favour of other churches, why members leave for

“greener pastures” and why visitors to the services stay for two or three Sundays and then are never seen again.

The puzzling aspect of many of these churches is that the preaching is sound, Scripture-based, preaches the Gospel of Christ, and the members are welcoming and friendly, providing a “family” atmosphere with supportive pastoral care for those who require it.

There are some denominations that have successfully turned the tide, attracting new converts, youth, and committed families. There are other churches that have always experienced growth, abundant committed youth, members with a sense of mission, and numbers of new converts, ever since they were first planted in their community. There are also entire mainstream denominations that are experiencing a general decline in numbers although much is being done to try and reverse the trend.

So, the question is: what is it about a church that attracts new members because they see that it is one that will meet their spiritual, emotional and physical needs, while another church fails to attract new members who do not see that church as one that will meet their needs and have members leaving because the church no longer supplies what they need from God and the leaders?

It is hoped that this book may provide some answers, or at least will make the questions clearer.

What Are We Preaching?

It is important that we are discerning about what preaching and teaching we listen to and believe. It is too easy to turn up at church, sing the hymns, get involved in the worship, which are great, but just because the preacher seems to be genuine and respected, we should not blindly accept what he preaches. We need to ask ourselves, “Is what he is preaching consistent with what is written in God’s Word?”

John says that we should not believe every spirit, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1-5). The definition of “prophet” is not limited to those who give predictive prophecies, or to those who stand up in Christian services and share a “love letter from God”. It is implied in Scripture that prophecy includes preaching as well. The Old Testament prophet was the preacher who informed the leaders and people what the mind of God was at each stage of the nation’s existence, and afterward during the Exile. So, when John says “prophets”, he is including anyone who gives doctrinal teaching to the Church, and he says that many false doctrinal teachers and preachers are invading the Church.

What John is saying is that when we hear a sermon or a teaching, we should not take it at face value. We should be aware that a particular doctrinal teaching could be false. True doctrinal teaching and preaching is centred around Jesus Christ, and points to Him as “*the Way, Truth, and the Life*” (John 14:6), and seeks to enhance a believer’s experience with Christ.

Any preaching or doctrinal teaching that puts a human personality, or church denomination before Christ is false. This is the type of teaching that limits a believer to compliance with a church's set of rules and regulations, taking away that believer's freedom to follow Christ as his or her priority. The Jewish religious leaders attempted to limit Peter and John by demanding that they do not teach in the Name of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:18), but Peter and John knew their priorities and replied, "*We ought to obey God rather than men*" (Acts 5:29). The Jewish religious leaders did not represent God to them. Judaism had its foundation on the religious principles of man and human wisdom. They gave the appearance of righteously complying with the Law, but they had rejected Christ. Therefore, the Apostles held to Christ and rejected the command of the Jewish authorities.

This is where we need to be discerning about any teaching or preaching that is offered to us. Does it promote Christ as Lord and Saviour, or does it promote a particular human personality or a church organisation? Where there is a conflict between complying with a dominant personality or church rule and our obedience to Christ as set out in the New Testament, we should make the same statement as the Apostles did: "*We should obey God rather than men*".

This is not to excuse anyone from disobeying the instructions of a legitimate authority, such as the civil law enforcement agents, or statutory requirements. Paul is quite clear about that (Romans 13:1-10). Also, in routine matters, if our church has a pastor and elders, we should comply with their instructions. Usually, these are the ones who pray for us and watch before God for our souls. Such leaders are more likely to be genuine and true than not.

But, "*man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7). The true-hearted pastor, elder, leader, preacher or teacher will seek to bring us closer

to Christ and to strengthen our faith in Him. So this is the test: Does the teaching or preaching bring us closer to Christ or does it deflect from Him to something or someone else?



The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God is centred in Christ. When Christ arrived He said, “*The Kingdom of God is among you*” (Luke 17:21).¹ This shows that where Jesus is, so is the Kingdom. He is the King, and so we cannot have a kingdom without the King.

It is interesting to see that when Jesus casts out a demon, He says that this is the indication that the Kingdom of God has arrived in His Person (Matthew 12:28). So, there is a direct link between the miracles of Jesus and the presence of the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist had his doubts at first about Jesus because his view was that when the Messiah turned up, the Kingdom would come in force, overthrowing the Romans and giving total political and social freedom to the Jews. But this was not happening. But the Lord’s answer to him was, “*Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and good news is preached*” (Matthew 11:4-5).² These miracles indicated that the Kingdom of God had arrived but was not universal to the nation, but for those who received and embraced Christ.

¹ Not *within you* as the KJV and NIV render it. In His subsequent mention of the Kingdom, He was clear, as was the Apostles and Paul, that the Kingdom is among us centred in Christ, visible to genuine believers who have the responsibility of making it visible through the preaching of the Gospel.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*; Baker Academic 2008.

So, the ministry of Jesus was to show the Jews that the Kingdom of God was here and He is the King, and included healing the sick, casting out demons, and other miracles, along with the preaching of the Gospel. In fact, the miracles that Jesus did provided the evidence of the presence of the Kingdom of God.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came to the Church and the Apostles, as well as Stephen, Philip, Paul and Barnabas, continued to preach the Kingdom along with the same signs and wonders that Jesus did. This shows that the Early Church believed that miracles, signs and wonders were an integral component of the presentation of the Kingdom of God. It was inconceivable that any preaching of the Kingdom did not include miracles.

Our Modern Church

We now have a modern Church that is divided up into many different groups and denominations. This situation is quite unlike the Early Church, which was one unified body of people. But even at that time, factions and contrary doctrines were appearing. Paul pointed to factions that existed in the Corinthian church, and John wrote his Gospel and first letter to deal with the Gnostic heresy which was invading the Church. Also, Paul had to reprimand Peter because he was associating with the Judaist faction when they arrived amongst the Gentile believers. If they were problems in the days of the Apostles, then those problems are magnified out of sight in our day!

So, the question we are now presented with is: which church organisation is preaching the true Kingdom of God? To try and answer that, we need to compare our churches with how the Kingdom was presented in the Gospels and Acts. We

have already seen that the Kingdom is preached with Christ as King and Lord, accompanied by signs and wonders. In fact, the “signs” are defined as those supernatural events (healing, miracles, casting out demons) that are signs of the Kingdom of God being amongst us. In Jesus’ time, it was Him in Person, in Acts it was in the Person of the Holy Spirit. So, in these days, it is also in the Person of the Holy Spirit as it was in Acts. The Book of Acts has never been finished, because it is on-going – through Church history and right up to our modern day.

So, when we view a particular church, the evidence that the Kingdom of God in Christ is being preached and taught, needs to show that Jesus is presented in the preaching of the Gospel as Saviour and Lord, the invitation is given for folks to come to Christ, the sick are healed and demons are cast out.

But we have a problem with many churches. Many church services are made up of three hymns and a sermon, which consists of academic teaching about the Bible, without any evidence of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, healing or deliverance from demonic influence. We have to conclude that these churches are not presenting the true Kingdom of God, and that the members are being short-changed in that they are getting “junk” teaching instead of the real thing. In fact, the ministers who preach in those churches are actually lying when they make out they are preaching the Kingdom of God, when they are not producing any substantive evidence of it.

Now many of those churches are sincerely preaching Christ, but their memberships are still declining in spite of their efforts, and so they make strategic plans, set up committees and programmes to trying and turn the tide, and wonder why none of these things are working. It is because they are preaching just gospel words and not the Kingdom. There is

no such thing as half a kingdom. There has to be a complete kingdom for a king or not at all. So, just preaching the good news on its own without any accompanying signs and wonders is falling short of presenting the true Kingdom of Christ to the congregation.

This goes also for churches that have Cessationist doctrine as part of their foundation doctrine. They are shooting themselves in the foot every Sunday, thinking they are on the right track when they are on a “no-exit” side road!

But what of the churches that are teaching that the miracles of Christ and the Apostles did not exist, that there was no virgin birth, and no resurrection? These churches are not even preaching the true Gospel let alone anything else. These churches may have the name “Christian” but they are just religious “synagogues” and not true Christian churches at all.

“Doing” the Bible

It has been said that “full-gospel” preaching (that is, the preaching of the Kingdom of God accompanied by the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, along with signs and wonders) is doctrine that divides. In actual fact, it does divide: those who believe the Bible and those who don’t. The Gospel itself brings division – between those who turn to Christ and those who reject Him.

It is one thing to know the will of God by teaching the Bible, but if we put the teaching of the Bible into actual practice, then we are “doing” the Bible. James points out that we should not just be hearers of the Word, but to be doers of it as well (James 1:22). He says something that we need to think about very carefully – that being content just to hear the

Word being preached but going away not doing anything about what we have heard, is deceiving ourselves. This means that multitudes of people in many churches are deceiving themselves, because they are hearing the words, but not converting what they are hearing into personal action.

For example, a person may hear the gospel and know that he or she should receive Christ as Saviour; but if nothing is done with that knowledge and the person does not actually receive Christ as Saviour, he or she will perish just like any other sinner who rejects Christ. Knowing what we should do is not enough for spiritual growth. Faith is a doing word. It has to be activated otherwise as James says, *“faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* (James 2:17).

We must remember in all this is that the signs and wonders are the work of the Spirit. We can't manufacture them. So, does this mean that we are not presenting the Kingdom if the signs and wonders are not evident? Well, yes...and no.

If we are content to just present religious words and ignore the supernatural we are not presenting the Kingdom, but just a set of religious ideals, ethics and principles. If we have fully accepted that the supernatural is an integral part of Kingdom preaching and are praying for it, and taking every opportunity to minister healing to the sick, and freedom from demonic bondage, then we are doing our part to present the true Kingdom of God to our people.

So what makes the difference? We minister healing and deliverance out of obedience to the Word, and not primarily for results. We have to trust the Lord for results. Sometimes they happen and sometimes they don't. Why is that? The Kingdom, although inaugurated, is not fully consummated yet. That will happen only when Jesus comes again. But that is no reason or excuse for not trying.

Statistically, those churches that fully accept and teach that signs and wonders accompany the Gospel and that the Spiritual gifts are fully taught and encouraged, are the ones that are growing, and those churches that are denying or ignoring the supernatural as part of their teaching and worship are declining. This should give us a clear indication of which churches are preaching and teaching the full Kingdom of God and receiving God's blessing and the involvement of the Spirit, as contrasted with those churches that are not teaching the Kingdom and are slowly dying. No amount of planning, programmes, organising, or committees will reverse the trend if God is not supporting them. If they pretend that God is supporting them, they are deceived and are kidding themselves.

The Challenge

But the reality is that the parable of the different types of soil (Luke 8:4-15) shows the different levels of response. Some churches, when presented with the challenge, will reject it outright saying, “We don’t want to be a church like that thank you very much!” Other churches will be initially enthusiastic about it, but as soon as opposition within their membership and from regional bishop or governing presbytery comes, they will lose their first incentive and return to what they were before. Other churches will become so caught up with organisational and property issues which will choke out any spontaneous use of the gifts. But there will be churches where the challenge will fall on good soil, and they will confess, receive forgiveness and restoration, and then bear fruit for Christ.

The Responsibility of a Watchman

Not everyone will be happy with what is written in this book. As was said previously, division will occur – those who believe what I have written and those who reject it. But I have the responsibility, as a watchman, to write what I know to be true. *“You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious”* (Ezekiel 2:7). It is the duty of a watchman to sound the warning, but it is beyond his control whether people choose to heed it or not.

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, speak to your people and say to them: ‘When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one

of their men and make him their watchman, and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not heed the warning and the sword comes and takes their life, their blood will be on their own head. Since they heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, their blood will be on their own head. If they had heeded the warning, they would have saved themselves. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood" (Ezekiel 33:1-6).

This means that one day we will all have to give an account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:2), and there will be professing Christians who will cry to God, "Lord, Lord, we didn't know we were deceived. Why weren't we warned?" He may point them to those who preached and wrote similar to what I have written here, and will say, "You were warned, but you did not listen; therefore you have no one else to blame but yourselves." But if I hold back from writing this warning and folk remain deceived and then are ashamed at the Judgment, then the Lord will asking me, "*Why did you not warn them when I made you aware of the danger?*" Trying to tell Him I was afraid would not be an excuse because He would direct me to His promise: "*But the LORD told me: 'Do not say, 'I am only a child.' For to everyone I send you, you must go, and all that I command you, you must speak. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver declares the LORD*" (Jeremiah 1:7-8).

Not Just Talk But Power

So this is why this book is written. It is to show that the Kingdom of God is not just a matter of talk: *“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only what these arrogant people are saying, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power”* (1 Corinthians 4:19-20). Paul is supporting the truth that the Kingdom of God involves supernatural signs and wonders: *“My message and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power”* (1 Corinthians 2:4).

Paul knew that the Kingdom of God involved supernatural signs and wonders. The miracles that accompanied his preaching showed that he would not have been satisfied that he was preaching the true Gospel of Christ unless it included the demonstration of the supernatural power of God. It was more than just his words that turned whole towns and communities from paganism to Christ. It was the impact of the miraculous healing and release from demonic bondage that accomplished the results, causing mass conversions to Christ and the planting of strong, vibrant churches.

When the full Gospel is preached, that is, the Kingdom of God with signs and wonders, evangelistic outreaches are strong and powerful, churches are healthy and growing. Where mere religious ethics and ideals are preached, churches are stagnant, anaemic and declining.

This involves more than a church with a particular “Full-Gospel”, “Pentecostal” or “Charismatic” label having all the power and other churches without those labels being weak and sickly. We are talking about the division between those

who believe the Bible and those who don't. Actually, some of those churches with the aforementioned labels are departing from the supernatural and transferring their reliance to the religious principles while trying to maintain spiritual and numerical growth. I saw this with the church I was converted in. In the 1960s the church strongly supported and preached the Gospel with signs and wonders, and many were being converted to Christ, healed and released from demonic bondage. I went and visited that same church in the late 1980s, and found that all that remained were the three hymns and a sermon with no trace of the supernatural. It had become no different from any other church that had just the words but no demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. But it still retained the same "Pentecostal" label.

It is interesting to note that upon observing the world at large, no evidence of the Kingdom of God is apparent. This is because although the Kingdom of God has come to us in the Person of Christ, it is only visible to those who are in Christ. Therefore it is the Christian church that has the responsibility to making the Kingdom of God visible to the community around it and the only way it can achieve it is to demonstrate the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to heal the sick and cast out demons. That's the way Jesus, the Apostles, Stephen, Philip, Paul and Barnabas did it, and that is the way that we Christians should do it. The Church has the power, and it has the responsibility and the ability to do it. The problem is that vast areas of the Church don't believe it.

When the Apostles and their supporters got together and prayed:

When the believers heard this, they lifted up their voices to God with one accord. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "You made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of

Your servant, our father David” “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?...And now, Lord, consider their threats and enable our servants to speak Your word with complete boldness, as You stretch out Your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of Your holy servant Jesus. When they had prayed, their meeting place was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:24-31).

A prayer that limits the request to just be able to preach the Gospel without the inclusion of asking the Lord to stretch out His hand to heal and perform signs and wonders, is praying that the Gospel is preached with words only without the demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord would not answer that prayer because it would mean that He would have to be inconsistent with His own Word that *“the Kingdom of God is not in word but in power”* (1 Corinthians 4:20). He is not going to support the preaching of half a kingdom. It has to be the whole Kingdom or none and the whole Kingdom of God involves the preaching of God’s Word with signs and wonders. The signs and wonders are the evidence that God, through the Person of the Holy Spirit, is involved. If we refuse to promote the supernatural signs and wonders as an integral part of our preaching, and the inclusion of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit in our worship and ministry, then God will not be involved, and all that will be left is the wisdom of man to try and get unbelievers to accept the Gospel.

Jesus knew that it was the miracles that evidenced the inauguration of the Kingdom of God and He showed it to John the Baptist to convince him. The Apostles knew that the signs and wonders were essential for showing the Jews that the Gospel was the truth, and they prayed with all their hearts that healing and miracles support the bold preaching of the Word. Paul knew that healing, deliverance, and

miracles were essential to winning the pagans over to Christ. There are many churches in our own day and age that know that healing and miracles are vital to the spread of the Gospel and the leaders and people are praying with all their hearts that these signs and wonders accompany the preaching of the Word.

Why the Miracles Don't Always Appear

There are reasons why the signs and wonders do not always appear when they are so necessary and when godly believers are praying so desperately for them.

The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but not consummated.

The consummation will not happen until Jesus comes again. Then, all sickness, disease and demonic influence will disappear and the reign of the Kingdom of God comes into full completion. Until then, people will get sick and not always be healed.

A hopelessly divided and factionalized Church.

influenced by the pagan views of Aristotle who taught that the only reality is that which can be proved by empirical evidence, thereby denying the supernatural as something that cannot be proved and therefore not believed and Plato who put emphasis on the spiritual rather than the physical so therefore physical healing was not relevant to the spiritual growth of the Church. Adopting these two pagan views makes the Church its own worst enemy in being able to accept that miracles, signs and wonders are integral components in the spread of the Gospel.

God will not give favour to any separate faction within our divided, denomination-structured Church.

This means that I am not optimistic that we will ever see a wide-spread emergence of supernatural signs and wonders within our local churches. This applies equally to those who believe the Bible and are praying with all their hearts for healing and deliverance to occur. God will always honour individuals in their ministries, and when they step out from under the authority and influence of their local church and operated in an interdenominational capacity there is a much greater likelihood that the supernatural will appear. This is because Christ will get the credit through the individual, and His glory will not be “hijacked” by a denominational church.

I know that people have the best of intentions, but human nature is human nature, and if widespread healing and other acts of Holy Spirit power start occurring in a local denominational church, it won't be long before the leadership of that church will take the credit for it. They will adopt the attitude that “because these supernatural acts are happened in our church, we must be the true church at the cutting edge of what God is doing and the other churches in our city are not as close to God as we are, therefore they must come under our “covering” or banner if they want God's best for them.” I don't think that God would have a bar of that!

My reason for saying this is that the Church in the Book of Acts was one Church. In the region there were just three main divisions: Judaism, Paganism, and the Christian Church. Because it was one body, having one faith, one God, and one baptism, the Holy Spirit could move in power and signs and wonders were visible and wide-spread. But as soon the Church became institutionalized and ceremonial, and the standards of holiness decreased, the signs and wonders, plus the supernatural Spiritual gifts declined.

But there were movements within the institutionalized Church that broke away from the mainstream and experienced signs and wonders, and although they were ‘factions’ in the theoretical sense of the word, the signs and wonders were evident to show how dead and ritualistic the mainstream church had become. This has been repeated time and again through Church history, right up to the modern day. When a movement that once had signs and wonders as part of its worship and evangelism degrades into formalism, denominationalism and ceremony, before long another movement characterised by signs and wonders emerges for the same reason: to emphasize the spiritual deadness of the previous movement. As a result, we have a factionalised Church full of ritualized “monuments” of men’s failure to remain faithful to their original prophetic calling in Christ.

We cannot put new wine into old wineskins.

The Scripture is quite true when it says: “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined” (Luke 5:37). This is the main reason why any individual or group within a mainstream denomination tries to encourage revival with signs and wonders is opposed by the leadership, sidelined, and eventually excluded. They are trying to put “new wine” into the “old wineskin” of a failed religious “monument”.³

I believe that genuine, Bible-believers who desire to preach and teach the full Kingdom of God with signs and wonders will feel more and more like “square pegs in round holes” in their local churches. They will eventually come to the point

² The same has happened now in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. As churches in these denominations have become ritualised and the presence of the supernatural has waned, those who have wanted to remain faithful to Christ in standing for and preaching the full Kingdom of God have had to walk away to form new faith fellowship groups.

where they would have felt that they have done all they could in trying to encourage the leaders and other members how vital signs and wonders are to the growth of the local church. They will sense a greater alienation and frustration as their encouragement and exhortation falls on deaf ears. They will then start praying for God to show them His will – whether to stay and persevere a little longer, or that a door will open to more fruitful ministry somewhere else.⁴

⁴ I know of a church elder who received a prophetic word that “the axe is at the foot of the tree and if the tree doesn’t bear fruit, it will be cut down” He took that to mean that if the church did not start to learn and teach the Spiritual gifts, the Lord would close it down. He believes that it is only the patience, grace and love of God for the people that He is allowing that church to remain.



"Miracles happen, gentlemen, but they don't come cheap."

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“Men and Brethren, What Shall We Do?”⁵

The problem that we face is getting from where we are right now to the place where we are seeing the signs and wonders accompanying our preaching of the Gospel. If having strategic planning days, constructing programmes and forming committees have not worked in spite of all the time and energy put into them, what can we do “plug in” to the power of the Holy Spirit?

Some wiser heads have suggested prayer – going to God and asking Him to release His power to make the preaching of the Gospel effective and bring new souls into the church. It is quite true that effectual fervent prayer is the powerhouse of the church (James 5:18). But what if the time and effort spent in the prayer meetings are merely for God to bless what we have already planned and programmed? Would that bring prayer down to the level where it is just corporate eye-brow massaging sessions and “prayer-lectures” to the others in the room? Would that type of praying shake the room, fill everyone with the Spirit and give them the boldness to preach the Gospel? Probably not. Many churches have a time of prayer just before the Sunday service, but it is usually asking God to bless what has already been programmed and is more like “knocking on God’s door” and running away before He has a chance to answer. It is basically saying to God, “We are going to do things our way, and we want You to bless it.” Then folks wonder why God seems to be silent and uninvolved. To resolve the conflict,

⁵ Acts 2:37

they take a blind “leap of faith” and maintain that “The Holy Spirit is present in our service and hovering over us” even while there is no substantive evidence of it.

The Prophets of Baal and King Ahab

The problem for Israel with the prophets of Baal was that although the nation had deserted God and had turned to worshiping idols, they were prophesying that everything was going to be okay; that the nation will continue to defeat its enemies and the people will live in peace, security and prosperity. King Ahab had all his prophets around him and when he was facing battle with Syria, got his prophets around him who prophesied victory (1 Kings 22). When King Jehoshaphat of Judah saw through these false prophets and asked for a prophet of the Lord, Ahab told him that there was one, but *“I despise him because he does not prophesy prosperity for me, but disaster”* (1 King 22:8). The prophets who surrounded Ahab were men pleasers. They did not want to offend the king. They went with the flow. What the king decided, they gave their support. But they couched their support in religious prophetic language. They had the *“form of godliness”* but not the power or voice of God (2 Timothy 3:5). Michaiah was not a men pleaser. He chose to please and obey God rather than men, even the king, though it made him unpopular and cost him his freedom. But the final result showed clearly that his prophecy was the will of God for Ahab, because even though Ahab tried his best to avoid the outcome by hiding his king’s robes but allowing Jehoshaphat to wear his. It showed Ahab’s evil heart in that he was prepared to betray even his ally to the enemy by making them think that they were firing at Ahab. But God

protected the godly Jehoshaphat by revealing his true identity to the Syrians who turned away from attacking him.⁶

Seeking the will of God and then declaring it will not make us popular with the “powers that be” in our churches. *“They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God”* (John 16:2). They will be so “locked in” to their programmes and rule books that they will see the person who declares God’s will as “the fly in the ointment” and will put down, side-line, discredit and expel him. But that is to be expected as the norm for those who would seek the will of God and not to please men where those men program themselves in ways that are inconsistent with God’s plans and purposes for His Church and for the world. *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* (2 Timothy 3:12). The persecution will usually come from religious people who will accuse the person of “not being a team player”, “not a true member of the body of Christ”, “disobedient of authority”, “having a Jezebel spirit”, “listening to the devil”, “bringing division and disunity into the church”, and other similar accusations. But these accusations come from those who program things their way and are deceived into thinking that God is blessing them. It is a type of religious arrogance that makes God into a “vending machine” to supply blessings and fruitfulness to what they think it best for their church and the people in it.

But God is not the Church, and the Church is not God. The visible Church is there to represent Christ to the world, and its leaders are instructed *“not to be unwise but understanding*

⁶ One might wonder why the godly Jehoshaphat made an alliance with Ahab, but I think that he had a non-judgmental heart and believed that it was more important to try to support victory for Ahab in the hope that it might change Ahab’s heart toward God. This shows the goodness of Jehoshaphat’s character and so God made sure that he did not share Ahab’s consequences.

what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). So, before giving time and effort into strategic planning, making up programmes and appointing committees, church leaders must wait upon God for as long as it takes to find out His will for their church. A significant part of finding the will of God is to read the Bible and believe that it is God's Word to mankind. No one can "cherry-pick" which parts of the Bible he decides to believe and to ignore. No one has the right to say which parts of the Gospel and Epistles are relevant for our modern church or not. To know the will of God, we have to die to our self-will. If our forms of worship, ministry and service are the products of religious self-will, then they must die in the light of God's will.

King Saul and Waiting for the Lord

So there is a period of waiting for God's will to become clear to us. Saul lost his kingdom because he became impatient when Samuel was delayed in coming to make the offering to God before the battle, and decided to make the offering himself (1 Samuel 13). He let his self-will take over. Making the offering was not wrong in itself, but he was the wrong person to make it. This is the problem for many churches: singing hymns, worshiping the Lord, preaching the Gospel, teaching the Word, fellowshiping with other believers, having a book of order, having presbyteries, bishops, pastors, and ministers are not wrong in themselves. These are all there so that the Church does things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). But it is the manner in which they function. They can either function according to the will of God or the will of men. That makes the difference concerning whether God is involved or whether He is absent and there is merely a false hope and pretence that the Holy Spirit is active in the church service.

Waiting on the Lord for His will is Scriptural: *“Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD”* (Psalm 27:14). It takes a lot of patience, faith and trust to wait for the Lord when there seems to be some urgency that something has to be done to avoid disaster. The human tendency is to think that one has to do something otherwise everything will “fall on its side”.

Guy Bevington, the late 19th Century Methodist Holiness evangelist would not preach the Gospel in a place until he had waited for God to give him a vision of how it was going to happen. He would wait hours, days, even weeks before the vision came. At one point, he fasted and waited in a hollow log in the woods for over three weeks until God gave him the vision of the school house door opening to him. Then he went and when it was unlocked for him, it opened exactly the way he saw it in his vision. We can look back and see how godly and faithful the man was to the Lord, but the religious people of his time thought he was eccentric and a bit crazy. But God honoured his faith and trust and his book records some very notable miraculous healing and salvation events.⁷

Waiting for God’s Voice

It is therefore important that in seeking God’s will, we wait until we hear God’s voice: *“And whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: “This is the way. Walk in it”* (Isaiah 30:21). The problem is that there are many voices in the world (1 Corinthians 14:10), and it can be difficult to distinguish the voice of God

⁷ Guy C Bevington, *Remarkable Miracles*, 1973, Plainfield NJ, Logos International.

among all these voices. If a person is inclined to self-will, that voice can be so loud in his mind that it can drown out all the other voices and it may take a long time of waiting on God before the self-will voice is stilled and God's voice can break through.

We can know God's voice as distinct from all the other voices: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me"* (John 10:27). Jesus is quite definite about that, and supports the view that genuine believers will hear and know the voice of God, and those who may be religious and not genuine believers may not recognise His voice, either through the Bible or the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This shows another division in our churches: those who recognise and hear God's voice and those who don't. Although, by outward appearance, it is difficult to tell the difference between one person and another, the outcome of what they do and say may give us important clues. *"You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?"* (Matthew 7:16).

One point to seriously consider: the voice of God will always point us to Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It will always assume that the Bible is absolutely true in everything it says about God and about us. It will never contradict what is clearly stated and taught in the Scriptures. Specifically, God's voice will always be totally consistent with the attributes of love stated clearly in 1 Corinthians 13. Any voice that does not show consistency is certainly not the voice of God and should not be trusted at all.

Waiting on God involves reading the Bible, meditating on it, discussing it with God and asking Him what He wants us to do about what He is revealing to us in His Word. Notice that the believers in Acts 4 did exactly that:

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

They faced the problem in a very realistic way.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

They started praying earnestly and in absolute unity.

“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

They acknowledged the total Lordship, power and sovereignty of God

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.*

They read the Scriptures and quoted them to the Lord.

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

They applied the Scripture to their present situation.

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

They made their request to the Lord, knowing that what they were asking was in the centre of God's will for them.

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: 24-31)

God, through the Person of the Holy Spirit acknowledged their prayer through the physical event of shaking the room then he believers were given a fresh filling of the Spirit and boldness to continue preaching God's Word.

It was only after they received confirmation that God had heard and answered their prayer that they went out and preached the Gospel in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. We don't know how long it took for God to respond. It may have been hours or days, but we know that they did not move from that prayer room until God responded. It was the same when Jesus told the disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power. We also don't know how long they waited, but when the right time came, the Holy Spirit came with physical evidence, and the Church was born. Very soon after that 120 believers became at least 3,120 believers! That is the effect when the power of the Holy Spirit is present in the preaching of the Kingdom of God. As we can see, the preaching of the Gospel and of the Kingdom of God are the same.

Knowing God's Will

The next stage is to do what He tells us to do. It is not enough just to know what God's will is for us. We have to activate our faith. It may be that God is telling us to do things entirely different to what we have ever done before. Doing this will often take us right out of our “comfort zone”. One of

the big hindrances is the comment: “We have done the same for the last 40 years and we don’t see any reason to change things around here.” Change is not pleasant. But we have to ensure that the changes we intend to make are the changes God wants us to make and not just another bright idea that might sound attractive but may come to nothing like all the other “good ideas” that have been tried in the past.

It is vitally important that we know the will of God for us: *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”* (Romans 12:2). So, in general, what do we know about the will of God? We know that the following is certainly God’s will for every believer:

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (2 Thessalonians 5:18). This means that we are always to be thankful. We may not want to give thanks for some of the things that happen to us, but we can always give thanks to God in them.

“For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people” (2 Peter 2:25). Goodness is one of the fruit of the Spirit. If we are living and walking in the Spirit we will be doing good to others and so will be doing to will of God in relation to them.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Conversion to Christ is the starting point. We are put on the road to sanctification, and as we walk it, we grow in the knowledge and grace of God.

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). This shows what the inauguration of the Kingdom of God involves for the believer: God’s will be done for them as it is done in heaven. The will of God in the

world at large will be done when the Kingdom will be finally consummated.

“If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17). This is important because anyone who is committed to doing God's will in any situation will know whether a preacher's preaching, minister's sermons, or a leader's leadership is from God or on his own authority.

“The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). It is God's will that all should reach repentance. We know that He will not achieve His will in every case, but we will be doing the will of God when we share the Gospel and God's invitation to others.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). It is God's will to forgive and cleanse anyone who confesses their sin to Him.

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Hebrews 13:20-22). It is God's will to equip us with everything that is good, including the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). It is therefore the will of God that we deal justly with all people whether they be in the household of faith or in the world, also reflecting the kindness of God as we interact with others and to remain humble under the mighty hand of God.

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (Hebrews 10:36). If we are to receive what God has promised us, we need to have done the will of God first. We see here that it does take patience and endurance to do the will of God in many cases, but the reward is worth the effort. If we are not receiving the promises, we need to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith and actually doing the will of God.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It is the will of God that everyone who believes in Christ will not perish but will have eternal life. In fact, the eternal life starts at the point of believing in Christ. Although our physical bodies have the sentence of death in them, we are alive in the Spirit and it is that life that will carry on when our bodies wear out and fall away.

“Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:4). It is God’s will that all people be saved, although not all will accept the invitation, but those who are saved will come to the full knowledge of the truth because God will reveal His whole plans and purposes to them.

“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:16-17). This is the difference between those structures and organisations that have been created through men’s self-will. They will pass away when Jesus comes again, because they were part of this world and not within the will of God. But those who do the will of God will safely pass through the “barrier” between time and eternity and will abide forever.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and

he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). This is the great difference between men’s understanding of the Kingdom of God and the revelation brought through the Holy Spirit. Modern men’s understanding of the Kingdom is the words of the Gospel without the supernatural – influenced by Plato and Aristotle. The revelation that comes from the Spirit shows the Kingdom of God with miracles, healing, signs and wonders. When we walk in the Spirit with a right understanding of the Kingdom, our path is straight, leading to glory with the Lord Jesus when He comes again.

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). This is linked with the Ephesians Scripture “be not unwise”, etc. If we are unclear about what the will of God is for our lives and our church, we have the promise that when we go to the Lord and ask for wisdom, He will give it to us and will not reproach us for asking.

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Our lives as believers are not haphazard. God has definite plans for us and they are centred in Christ within us the hope of glory. We are filled with the Spirit to achieve a definite purpose in this life and the life in eternity. We have a future and a hope in Christ, and when we pray and call upon the Lord. He will not only hear, but will stop and listen to what we saying to Him. He will not be a mysterious entity to us, because as we seek Him with all our heart, He reveals Himself to us and we will know Him and will recognise Him when we meet Him face to face.

“Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that” (James 4:15). We can’t depend on our own

planning for the future, but we can seek the Lord for His will, and then mark out our future according to His will revealed to us. This is why some seeming well-made plans come to nothing because the will of God was not sought and obtained before the planning was done.

“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:17). We live in an evil world dominated by Satan; therefore because we are not part of the world, even though we are in it, we will suffer adversity. Also, because many areas of the church are more in the world than apart from it, when we seek to do the will of God, we will experience “flak” from religious people who have less grace in them than the pews they sit on. If we seek the will of God and do good according to what is revealed to us through the Word and through God's voice, we will cut right across the self-will plans and purposes of those who are determined to follow the processes devised by men.

“For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). Those who are genuinely converted to Christ and who seek to do the will of God in their lives and what they do for Him, are in the family of God, and Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters (Hebrews 2:11).

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:38-40). Jesus came to do the will of the Father and not His own will, and He sent us the Holy Spirit to represent Him through us to the world. When we seek the will of God, we are seeking the will of the Father. Jesus came to seek and save those who are lost and when we do what we can to represent Jesus and share the good news of the Gospel we are doing the

will of God. A church that exists as a religious “club” catering only for its own members and doing little or nothing to share the Gospel with the community around it is not doing the will of God. This would be a sobering thought for the leaders and members of many of our churches.

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!” (Psalm 143:10). We need to be seeking and waiting on God to teach us to do His will. We get our understanding of God’s will from reading and studying the Scriptures, and then we walk in the Spirit to activate, in faith, what we have learned from Him.

“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand” (Proverbs 19:21). This is why it is vitally important that we get into the presence of God in our private place and seek the purpose of God for us and our church. Anyone can do strategic planning and hope that their plans will work. There is no end to the plans that men can bring forth. Some work and some come to nothing. The difference is whether the plans fit the purpose of the Lord or not. Plans that don’t fit into the purpose of God will fall on their sides, but those that are made according to God’s purpose will not only stand but will bear much good fruit for the Lord.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:21-23).

“I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me” (John 5:30). If Jesus said that He could do nothing on His own, but needed to hear the voice of His Father,

then we can do no more. We need the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to equip us for the work of the Gospel in order to accomplish anything in our community and to grow our church, spiritually and numerically.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). If we want our church to be built on a solid foundation, we need to hear the voice of Jesus through the Holy Spirit and take His words to heart and do them.



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“Why do you always obsess about the one negative response?”

The Wise and the Foolish

The parable of the wise and foolish virgins is significant in our study of the Kingdom of God and how it is presented through our lives and our church. The story is in Matthew 25. The function of the virgins was to be torch-bearers and was to form a particular service in the wedding celebration. So it was important for their torches to continue functioning for them to have their part in the proceedings. Five of them had extra oil to fuel their torches in case of any unexpected delays, and the other five did not. Of course, as usual, there was a delay, and the oil in the torches of all ten was depleted and needed recharging. The five who were prepared had the extra oil, and the other five pleaded that the first five share their oil; but if they did, there would not be enough oil and none of them would be able to fulfil their duties. And there was not enough time for the purchase of extra oil, because when the five returned with extra oil, the door was shut, the celebration started and they were locked out.

What does this say to us in connection with the Kingdom of God? If we are to reap the promises and benefits contained in the Kingdom of God, we must be fully prepared. Firstly, we must have a correct understanding of the nature of the Kingdom as pointed out in the Scriptures. Secondly, we must be genuinely converted to Christ and be baptised with the Holy Spirit, so that we are living and walking in the Spirit, and not in a religious spirit. Thirdly, we need to know the will of God for us in relation to the pursuit of love and the manifestation of the Spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has willed for us. Fourthly, we are to be prepared to activate our faith, pleasing God, rather than men.

If we don't have the necessary preparation in terms of the above four points, then we come short of having enough of the anointing of the Spirit to do the will of God and it is only those who do the will of God who will be accepted into the presence of God. All others will find the door locked and bolted and they will be shut out. This is a very sobering thought.

When "anointing" is mentioned, it refers to the anointing of oil which is a symbol and type of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. It was seen when the Holy Spirit came on Old Testament people and they performed miracles, exercised authority, won battles, and prophesied. Once the task was completed, the Holy Spirit lifted off them. But after the Day of Pentecost, the anointing of the Holy Spirit came and filled the believers and the infilling was permanent, so that they not only started living in the Spirit, but were enabled to walk in the Spirit continuously. This meant that the indwelling Holy Spirit gave them the preparation to fulfil the will of God in any situation. In other words, they had all the "oil" they needed to perform their calling and ministry in Christ.

But the five unwise virgins might represent those who may have made a profession of Christianity, but do not go on to get a complete understanding of what the baptism with the Spirit entails. They allow the Spirit to remain dormant in them and mistakenly think that God's purpose will be accomplished by some mystical (magic) process. The truth is that when the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, He comes with a set of spiritual tools (gifts) that He expects believers to use to empower the preaching of the Gospel and to strengthen and build up the Church. It is through using the gifts of the Spirit that enables the Kingdom of God to be presented along with miracles, signs and wonders. There is no other way in which the Kingdom is to be presented

according to God's will. Those who say they are presenting the Kingdom of God but denying the inclusion of signs and wonders are not doing the will of God and are deceived if they think they are.

The parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30) shows us the same principle in a different way. We see that every professing believer is given varying gifts and abilities which he is expected to use to fulfil the will and purpose of God for him and his church. Every person who used his talents is rewarded double what he was originally given. This is supported by the Scripture: *"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much"* (Luke 16:10). The man with the one talent, if he had used it the same as the others, he would have been rewarded the same as the others; but he hid it and did not use it because he was afraid. The master told him that he was a wicked servant and the man was cast out.

The principle behind the failure of the one-talent man to use his talent for the benefit of his master was a lack of understanding of the nature of the master and his fear of losing his talent if he risked investing it. But the master told him that he could have just put it in the bank and earned a bit of interest on it. This shows that just a small return from our efforts is rewarded. If God gives us the Spirit and His gifts, we are required to use them for the Master's benefit, and the Master benefits when souls are saved and His Church is strengthened and built up.

What prevents many using their Spiritual gifts (or talents) is fear – the fear of men. There are two heads to this monster: (1) Respect for a mentor who has Cessationist views promoting the desire to please him. (2) Fear of what others, especially his church leaders, may think of him if he promotes the learning and using the Spiritual gifts in the

church. The man with the one talent had both – respect and fear, and the master would not accept those as fair reasons for not at least getting a little bit of interest from the talent. In the same way God will not accept these as viable reasons why professing believers should not use their prophetic gifts⁸ in the church services.

But there is another issue to be considered. There are churches that have members who have a correct appreciation of the Baptism with the Spirit and who fully believe that the Spiritual gifts are needed to build up and strengthen the church. The trouble is that the minister/pastor/leadership of these churches does not believe that the gifts are to be used in the modern-day churches, and so give no encouragement or opportunity to develop or use them in the services. The member has the choice of either leaving the church and find another church that will encourage, develop, equip, and give opportunity for its members to activate the gifts in the services or to stay with the church and do what he can in other areas and find other outlets where he can put his Spiritual talents to good use for the benefit of those who accept them. God is faithful to those who genuinely desire to do His will in the use of the Spiritual gifts. This is in line with the Scripture quoted previously: *“If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority”* (John 7:17). Applying the Scripture to the use of Spiritual gifts, if the person's will is to do God's will in this area, he will know whether the gift he has is from God, and will know the right environment in which to use it. If he is prevented from using the gift in his local church, then he will find another venue where his gift will be accepted and utilised.

⁸ When I say “prophetic gifts” I mean the full list of the gifts of the Spirit outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.

Conclusion

In summary, we have established that the Kingdom of God has two components: the preaching of the Gospel and miracles, signs and wonders. One cannot exist without the other if the Kingdom of God is presented according to the will, plans and purposes of God for the Church and for the world.

It was the preaching of the Kingdom accompanied by miracles by Jesus that brought the Jews face to face with the fact that their Messiah had arrived and that the Kingdom had been inaugurated. It was also the presentation of the Kingdom accompanied by miracles that brought the Jews to the reality that Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive. It was the preaching of the Kingdom with signs and miracles following through Paul that whole communities of pagans turned to the Lord.

Throughout Church history, where the Kingdom was preached accompanied by miracles, that the integrity of the true Church was preserved through the centuries. John Wesley preached the Kingdom along with 250 documented healings, including his horse, throughout his ministry. As a result, multitudes turned to Christ and a whole movement was formed that reflected the life of the Spirit in an otherwise dead religious environment.

In the late 19th Century, Maria Woodworth-Etter preached the gospel and showed that the Kingdom of God had arrived among her hearers in the form of visions, prophecies and remarkable healing. The later Pentecostal revival in the

early 20th Century, the Healing revival in the mid 20th Century, the Argentine revival in the later 20th Century all exhibited the characteristics of the arrival of the Kingdom of God in the midst of the people, along with signs and wonders.

The churches and movements that had the characteristic of the preaching of the Gospel with signs and wonders experienced explosive growth, because their presentation was what ordinary people were hungering for. When Christ is lifted up He will draw all people to Him (John 12:32). When the Kingdom of God is preached with signs and wonders, it shows the reality of the resurrection of Christ, His living presence, and His love, grace, mercy, and compassion to heal the sick and set the prisoners of demon influence free. No other religion can offer this, because the gods of those religions are no gods at all. They cannot hear prayer, speak to their devotees, or heal the sick in the way that the living Jesus can do.

The onset of Kingdom preaching with the miraculous demonstration of the Spirit brought further division into the Church which was already seriously divided and factionalized. The division was between those churches that embraced the miraculous demonstration of the Spirit, and those who refused it. In general, there emerged three major divisions in the Christian Church: the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and the Full Gospel movements.⁹ Out of the three, it has been the Full Gospel movements that has outgrown the other two. This is because ordinary folk hunger for more than just religious ideals, morality and ethics. They don't want to attend a church that tells them how to live and nothing more. They want to attend a church that preaches a Gospel that meets their physical and spiritual needs. They

⁹ Those which preach the Kingdom of God with miracles.

desire to be in a church that shows them the risen, living Christ who forgives their sins and heals their diseases, who speaks to them through the prophetic word, and works through ministries that assist them through the Word of Knowledge and Wisdom, who can confirm their godly spirit through the Discernment of spirits, encourage them to achieve the impossible through the gift of Faith. They want a church that shows them Jesus who is present with them through the week as well as on Sunday mornings.

The reason why miracle-denying churches find it difficult to win souls for Christ is that people no longer believe the Bible as was the case before the late 19th Century. Because of this, we have a neo-pagan society where Christianity is a minority world-view. So preaching of a mere word-based gospel is unconvincing to the majority, and for an unbeliever to turn to Christ under that type of preaching is actually a miracle in itself!

But things have not really changed since the First Century A.D. As the pagan society of that time needed the Kingdom of God preached with miracles, so we need the same preaching and miracles in our present neo-pagan society if we are going to win significant numbers of people to Christ and turn the tide from paganism to godliness.

Every individual believer has a choice to make, in the same way that Moses said to the people, *“Who is on the Lord’s side?”* (Exodus 32:26). Every individual heard Moses’ instruction and had his own choice to make whether he complied with it or not. Those who complied were safe, those who did not put themselves in danger. For Jesus to *be our “refuge and strength”* we need to be *“on the Lord’s side”*. We have to make that choice. It has to be a deliberate, knowing choice to side with the Lord against all opposition. Our future in Christ will depend on it.

The Way Back

It is easier than you think to be restored to a right place with God and to start presenting the Kingdom of God in the right way. 1 John 1:9 is the first step: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* This is God’s way of restoration. If the leaders of a church are prepared to confess that they are wrong in denying the inclusion of the supernatural in their church programmes, and their Cessationist attitude is sinful unbelief and rejection of God’s Word and that they were turning away from Christ Himself in their refusal to allow the learning and practice of the Spiritual gifts in their church, then forgiveness and restoration occurs immediately. Then they need to actively promote the inclusion of signs and wonders in their preaching and teaching, and to set up equipping sessions to learn how to use the gifts of the Spirit correctly, and then give opportunity in their church services and meetings for those gifts to operate. I believe then, the tide will turn and their church will begin to grow with souls being saved and new members coming in seeking more of Christ.

But learning the lessons from Church history,. although the promise: *“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”* (2 Chronicles 7:14) is the invitation realistically many “old wineskin” leaderships will not be prepared to depart from their ritual and ceremonies. Therefore, if a genuine Bible-believer wants to see and experience signs and wonders, he may have bid them goodbye outside of that local church so that he doesn’t die with it.



Paul Christensen

I was converted to Christ on October 30 1966 in a church where people enjoyed the presence of God and were passionate about serving Christ and praising God. My first impression of that church was that if those people were that enthusiastic about their faith, maybe I should be too.

This was a church that encouraged and celebrated the use of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These were normal components of the worship and made the church interesting and exciting for me.

Receiving Christ was the best decision I ever made, and I have never regretted it. I don't know where I would be today if I had never had become a Christian. God has never failed me at any time, even though the lowest episodes of my life. Living with God is the best life that anyone could experience.

I completed a Masters in Divinity in my old age, and it was a wonderful journey. The process gave me a more in-depth understanding of Scripture and Church History, as well as the practical aspects of ministry, worship and fellowship.

I firmly believe that being in a church that strongly encourages and supports its members using all the ministries and gifts of the Spirit, certainly enhances a believer's experience with Christ and enables an exciting and meaningful walk in the Spirit.

