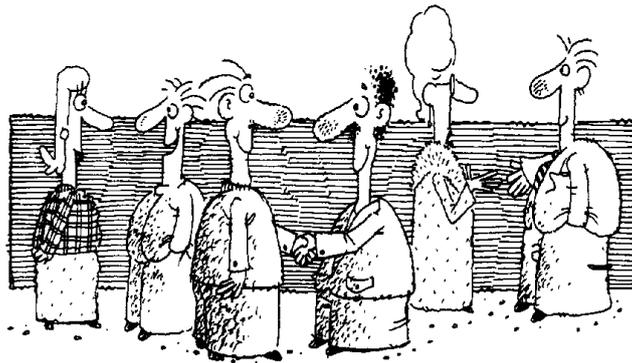


YOUR CHURCH...



**A RELIGIOUS “TEMPLE”
OR
FELLOWSHIP CENTRE?**

Paul Christensen

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Paul Christensen M.A. M.Div.
Published and Printed by
Divine Healing Training Ministries
Conifer Grove 2112
Auckland
New Zealand

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Feedback, testimonies and enquiries to:
email: Paul90@slingshot.co.nz

First Printing May 2013
This Edition November 2018

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“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.

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.

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 honorable we treat with special honor. 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 honor 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 honored, every part rejoices with it.

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 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 12:12-31).

INTRODUCTION

This study is about the Church, how it should function, how it is functioning in many areas today, and what we might have to do to bring it up to the standard in which the Holy Spirit can move freely to achieve the plans and purposes of God in our generation. Of course, we call that standard “revival”.

In actual fact, “revival” is the Church working in partnership with the Holy Spirit as it should. The experience of the Book of Acts has often been held up as the standard for revival, but we must understand that the Church in the first fifty years of its existence as a New Testament Church was an infant Church still getting its “sea legs”, as it were. It was plagued with inexperience, contrary doctrine, false apostles, misuse of the Spiritual gifts, and in many areas, party spirit involving opposing groups declaring that “we follow Apollos”, “we follow Paul”, and the super-spiritual lot who maintained that they were the best of all – “we follow Christ”.¹

Yet, the Church made remarkable gains over the pagan world, and in three hundred years overthrew the dominance of paganism and became the official religion of the Roman Empire.²

¹ “One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:12).

² Some think that the real problems in the Church started at the point when the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman

What we intend to do is to conduct a survey of the evolution of the church from its beginnings to the Day of Pentecost, and then how the Church functioned effectively for the first three hundred years after Pentecost. Then we want to examine the factors that caused the Church to become formalised, where the supernatural faded away from the “official” Church.³

Next, we want to examine the growth of the Church since the Reformation to the present day, the factors which are limiting the effectiveness of the church in these days, and some idea of the possible remedies to bring the Church back to where it should be – revival.

This looks like quite a mission to achieve, and to settle any misunderstanding, this study is not designed to be an exhaustive theological or academic study of the progress of the Christian Church through the centuries. There are plenty of well-researched works that give a much better account of Church history than I can, but my purpose is to compare our present day Church with the 1 Corinthians Scripture passage at the start of this study with what is happening in these days.⁴

To give us a workable understanding of this, we have decided to do a “thumb-nail” sketch of the beginning and

Empire, closed down the pagan temples, and required everyone, whether they were committed to Christ or not, to join the Christian Church.

³ The supernatural gifts of the Spirit, including tongues, prophecy, healing and deliverance occurred in the different movements that appeared, most deemed heretical by the “official” Church. The latest research suggests that these movements were closer to the genuine working of the Holy Spirit than previously thought. See *2000 Years Of Charismatic Christianity, A 21st Century look at Church history from a Pentecostal Charismatic perspective*, Eddie L. Hyatt, 2002, Charisma House.

⁴ This study is my own opinion, However, I will do my best to be consistent with Scripture and the important elements of Church History within the opinions that I offer in the study.

evolving of the Church through the Old Testament to the New, and then through periods of the development of the Christian Church until the present time.

It is the basic premise of this study that although the “invisible Church”, made up of all those who have embraced Christ as Saviour, is perfect and largely unaffected by the problems of the “visible” Church,⁵ the organisation that we know as the “visible” Church is fraught with divisions, diverse doctrines, formalism, cessationism, worldliness, politics and interpersonal conflict.

Yet, in spite of these problems, there is a “hard core” of believers who are devoted to Christ and working hard to counter the issues that are “tripping” the Church up in so many places.

It must be stated that the majority of our Western Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches are led by and made up of sincere, genuine believers who want Christ to be glorified and souls saved. Therefore it is important that readers do not think that we are setting out to criticise our Church leaders.

If we view the problems in our churches as “in the light-bulb”, rather than in any person, then we are not tempted to be defensive, but are looking away from ourselves and are corporately viewing the problems themselves and looking for solutions to them.

But at the same time, we don’t want to “water down” the extent of the problems by compromising through the “fear of

⁵ Individual Christians still have a sinful nature and are not perfect in themselves. I do not believe that this degrades the perfection of the “invisible” Church at all, because believers are clothed with the Righteousness of Christ, and this causes the Father to view believers as totally clean and perfect in His sight. We will be looking at the importance of believers knowing where they stand with Christ as an important component of getting the Church up to the standard where it is functioning according to the design that God intended.

man” or through exaggerated respect for any prominent leaders or personalities in the Church. In fact, the New Testament (and the Holy Spirit) does not recognise any person who elevates themselves into a place of power and authority to the point where believers are forced or induced to look to them instead of to Christ. We will discuss this problem of “power and control” later in the study.

So having introduced the study, let’s start by looking at the development of man’s relationship with God and the formation of the Old Testament form of “the Church”.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Fall Through To The Tabernacle

After the Fall, for many centuries, God did not have a corporate presence in the world. The Scripture describes individuals who heard from and walked with God. Enoch was a notable figure. He walked with God and one day he never came home, because God took Enoch straight to Heaven without him having to experience death.⁶ We also have Noah, who knew and fellowshiped with God. As a result of his fellowship, he and his family were saved while all the other inhabitants of the world were drowned in the Flood.⁷ The next character that we hear of is Abraham, whom God told to leave his home and go where directed to a land where he would be a stranger.⁸ Then we have Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and last of all Moses. All this while there was no visible “church” that could be identified as a place where God was worshipped.

It is with Moses, that we are introduced to a nation of people with whom God is about to identify Himself. We see this first in His declaration: **“Let My people go!”** (Exodus 5:1). Here, God is declaring that the nation that was formed out of the descendents of Jacob is His people,

⁶ Genesis 5:24

⁷ Genesis chapters 6-8

⁸ Genesis 12:1-3

and He is demanding freedom for them from the yoke of Egyptian slavery.

It is when they, as a nation of over four million souls, started out from their homes in Egypt, that they begun their journey as an independent nation, yet without a homeland. But they had the promise of a land across the other side of the wilderness “**flowing with milk and honey**” (Exodus 3:8), where they would settle and became a nation which enjoyed the favour of God.

Well, that was the plan.

They got across the Red Sea and camped in front of Mount Sinai. It was there that the first tabernacle was constructed, and God came down and His glory was present in the tabernacle.⁹ This was the first instance of a visible place where the glory of God resided.

But not all were permitted to share in the direct presence of God’s glory. Moses had constructed a fence along the front of Mount Sinai to keep the people and their animals back from approaching the mountain.

The presence of God on the mountain was threatening to them, with fire and thunder. Only Moses was permitted to go up into the mountain where he received the Ten Commandments.

Joshua was the other person allowed into the tabernacle along with Moses when the glory of God came down in the form of a cloud and stood at the door. There must have been something about Joshua’s devotion to the Lord that he was permitted to share the glory of God.

⁹ A good description of the tabernacle of Moses is found on <http://the-tabernacle-place.com/articles/what-is-the-tabernacle>

All though the wilderness experience, after Israel failed to enter the Promised Land through unbelief, the Tabernacle was a temporary structure, designed to be put up where Israel camped, then taken down and transported to the next place and erected again.

Aaron and his sons were appointed to be the priests who ministered before the Lord during that time, and the Priesthood evolved out of that beginning. So, now the visible “church” comprised the Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the general congregation of people.

“During David's time the tabernacle (or tent) housed the Ark of the Covenant and was a precursor to the temple that Solomon would build. It was a rectangular house of worship, made with elaborate design. Its presence and functionality, with priests, was a sign of God's favor and presence.”¹⁰

The Temple of Solomon was a permanent structure, replacing the Tabernacle, but fulfilling the same function – a place where the glory of God dwelt. Of course, the glory of God did dwell in the holy of holies while Israel remained faithful to Him, but when they fell away and worshipped other gods, the glory of God departed.¹¹

After the captivity of Israel, when the Temple of Solomon was destroyed, individual houses of worship were set up where people could gather to pray.¹² This possibly was the

¹⁰ <http://www.gotquestions.org/tabernacle-of-David.html>

¹¹ “She [the daughter-in-law of Eli the priest] named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”--because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband” (1 Samuel 4:21).

¹² During the Babylonian captivity (586–537 BCE) the Men of the Great Assembly formalized and standardized the language of the Jewish prayers. Prior to that people prayed as they saw fit, with each individual praying in their own way, and there were no standard prayers that were recited. Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, one of the leaders at the end of the Second Temple era,

first time people gathered in groups for the purpose of worshipping God.

It is unclear how the Jews worshipped when they reoccupied Judea during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, but by the time of the ministry of Jesus, Synagogues were well-established as places of worship in places where people could not get conveniently to the Temple. Until A.D. 70, the Temple was the central place of worship, and was the centre of most community religious activities. We see that Jesus attended the synagogue at Nazareth,¹³ and at certain times He and his family went to Jerusalem to attend worship at the Temple during specific occasions.¹⁴

Private Homes

After the Day of Pentecost, the disciples of Christ met in private homes for group worship, and went up to the Temple to share and teach the Gospel. It was only after the intense persecution that occurred after the death of

promulgated the idea of creating individual houses of worship in whatever locale Jews found themselves. This contributed to the continuity of the Jewish people by maintaining a unique identity and a portable way of worship despite the destruction of the Temple, according to many historians. Synagogues in the sense of purpose-built spaces for worship, or rooms originally constructed for some other purpose but reserved for formal, communal prayer, however, existed long before the destruction of the Second Temple. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synagogue>

¹³ “He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom” (Luke 4:16).

¹⁴ “Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴²When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom” (Luke 2:41-42).

Stephen¹⁵ that the preaching of the Gospel at the Temple was discontinued; but the group worship in private homes continued.

For the first 300 years after the Day of Pentecost, the Christian church consisted of groups of believers meeting in private homes. There were times when there were special teaching meetings held in a home capable of accommodating a larger group.¹⁶

This style of corporate Christian worship continued until the Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, closed the pagan temples, converted them to serve as Christian places of worship, and required the pagans, whether they had made a heart-commitment to Christ or not, to attend the worship services. This was the start of the “visible” formal Christian Church as we know it.¹⁷

¹⁵ “On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1).

¹⁶ “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting” (Acts 20:7-8).

¹⁷ More information concerning Constantine and Christianity can be found in Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing The Roman Empire A.D. 100-400*, Yale University Press, 1984, ISBN 0-300-03642-6



Everyone in our church has problems except you and me...
And I am not sure about you!

PAUL'S VIEW OF THE CHURCH

The Scripture passage at the start of this study contains the function of the Christian Church as viewed by the apostle Paul. To clarify, we will “unpack” the reference. Because Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his letters, which form much of New Testament teaching, we can confidently say that this is also the Holy Spirit’s view of how the Church should be functioning.¹⁸

“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.”

Paul is comparing the Church with the human body. There is a sense in which it is a complete entity in itself, and in another sense it is composed of many parts, each with a separate, important function. The popular term for the Church is “the Body of Christ”. This is not the Lord’s literal body, but speaks of a body of people who are identified with Christ. “The term “Christian” is also used adjectivally to describe anything associated with Christianity, or in a proverbial sense “all that is noble, and good, and Christ-like.”¹⁹

¹⁸ “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16),

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian>

When we look at the human body, we can see the complete person, but we can also see that he/she has arms, legs, head, eyes, etc. So we can see the complete whole and the parts that make up the whole at the same time. It is the same with the Church. We can see the whole assembly and are able to call it “the Church”, but we also, at the same time, see each individual person that makes up the assembly, with their gifts and abilities – some more prominent than others.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to merge all Christians together to form a single entity, and there is no distinction concerning race, education or social position. Each member of the body has an equal status, and each individual member has equal access to the life of the Spirit.

But the entity is not made up of just one part. It is a composite whole, with each part fitting into the place where it is supposed to be. One individual can function by himself to a great degree, but cannot function completely. As one strand of rope can be easily broken, more strands weaved together to make up the rope vastly increases its strength.

“Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

“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. “

No part of the body is expendable. Each part has a necessary function to perform. Take away one part, and the body becomes dysfunctional. If too many parts are taken away, the body ceases to function at all. It seems

that some in the Corinthian Church were making comparisons between different roles and functions, saying that one role was more important than another, and that just because one member did not function in the same way as others viewed as more important, that member was not a *bona fide* part of the fellowship.²⁰

This means that the janitor who cleans the toilets is just as much part of the Church as the preacher. The ministry of helps is just as important as the five-fold ministries. If the Church did not have its accountants, there would be no controls on how the money would be spent, and the Church would be open to fraud.

The usher who shows people to their seats is just as much part of the ministry team as the counsellor who leads people to Christ after the altar-call is given.

“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.”

Paul carries on appealing to people’s common sense. This is true with most of the teaching of the New Testament, especially from Paul. He uses “down-to-earth”, common sense examples to emphasise his points. Here he continues to make the comparison with the human body. Can we imagine a human body made up of just one eye? It is impossible, ridiculous, belonging possibly to science

²⁰ Some have “spiritualised” the different parts of the human body mentioned by Paul, such as the “hand” being the ones who do the “hands-on” work, the “ear” being the prophetic “listeners”, the “eye” being the prophetic “seers”, etc. Even though this might be an interesting and entertaining subject for a sermon, I don’t think Paul thought about these things in this way. His view is a lot simpler than that.

fantasy novels. Whoever heard of a big ear running around on a little pair of legs? The very idea is laughable!

So, in the Church, if the whole church was made up of preachers, where would the listeners be? If everyone were intercessors on their knees in the basement, where would the worship music team be?

The fact is that God has designed the Church to be what He wants it to be. He has placed the preacher, song leader, treasurer, elder, pastor, janitor, usher, piano player, tea lady, evangelist, prophet, intercessor, home-made-cookie maker, all in their rightful roles in the Church to make up a fully functioning body.

If all the body were made up of just the pastor and a congregation of home-made-cookie makers, then instead of a fully functioning Church, we would have just one overweight pastor!

But when all the different ministries are present and functioning appropriately, then we have the body as it should be; in other words, how God wants it. How do we know the will of God for our Church? See all the members of the church having their right gifting and functioning in their roles from the Holy Ghost preacher to the child who collects the communion glasses after the Sunday service.

But we should not forget to mention that there is only one body. Paul envisaged only one Christian Church.

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).

The Holy Spirit does not support a multiplicity of Christian Churches, each having a different doctrinal base and function separate from each other. In the case of a

conflict between different churches, the question could be asked: “Whose side is God on?”²¹

The answer for the Church is that God is on His own side. Moses asked the question in the face of conflict among the children of Israel over his leadership.²² The resulting event showed that God is interested only in one body of people devoted to Him. Therefore a divided Church would not have His support. This is probably why we do not see the supernatural “signs-following” that we see described in the Book of Acts, and that we desire for today. If we are to see the supernatural the way that God intends, then we have to resolve the division issue in the Church first.

“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 honorable we treat with special honor. 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 honor 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 honored, every part rejoices with it.”

²¹ *This question was asked by both the Allies and the Germans during D Day (Cornelius Ryan; The Longest Day; 1959, Simon & Schuster).*

²² Exodus 32.26

Now Paul turns the argument around the other way. Before, if one part of the body was not another part, it could not say it was not part of the body. Now, Paul is saying that one part of the body, that might deem itself more important than another part, cannot say to that part, “I don’t need you.” It is like the head saying to the hand that it is not needed because it is not as important as the head. The big toe is important to the body, even though it is not as attractive as other parts. Without the big toes, it would be difficult, almost impossible for the body to keep its balance when trying to walk.

There are private parts of the body, the anus being a prime example. This probably is the most unattractive part of the body, but as anyone knows who has had bowel cancer, and has had to wear a bag, that part of the body is indispensable, and when it is made inoperable through cancer, the body suffers. No doubt Paul was thinking about those private parts of the body that no-one wants to think about, let alone display to the world, unless that person is an exhibitionist and perverted in their thinking.

The Church is the same. There is the “glamour-man” up there on the platform, “preaching up a storm”, seeing souls coming to Christ and being healed and delivered. People are tempted to think that the effectiveness of the Church rests on those roles. But if the toilets are dirty and smelly and the smell invades the auditorium, many people would leave the service and the preacher’s message would be ineffective for them. So we need the janitor to keep the toilet areas clean.

The Church needed to grow, especially in its early stages, and the growth had to come from the pagan world. This meant that the ministry of the evangelist, with the appropriate resources, was needed to go out and win souls

for Christ; to bring people out of their paganism and into the Church. Then the pastors would shepherd them to a closer walk with Christ.

There was no such thing as a “one-man-band” in Paul’s view of the Church. It was important to him that all the members, whether in the public view or behind the scenes, were given the same honour. In his opinion, giving greater honour to one person or role, just because it carries more glamour with it, is fostering division in the church. Unity was vitally important to him and when all members were equally honoured and all felt that their role was just as important as theirs, the body functioned in complete unity.

Because of this unity, and the love that every member had for each other, irrespective of whether the role of the member was in the public arena or in the basement, the spiritual and physical well-being of all was of major concern to all. If one member suffered, then this was felt by all the others as if they were suffering themselves, and if one member was particularly blessed of God and was rejoicing, then all the others shared in their rejoicing.

“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 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.”

Paul now makes it personal to the ones to whom he is writing. He is not writing about obscure theological

theories. This is reality. They are the church, and every member is an essential part of it.

The different roles that make up the church are not man-appointed. It is God who has appointed different people to different roles, according to His own will. Paul explained in another place that his own apostleship did not come through man's appointing, but by the Holy Spirit.

“Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1).

If a person is appointed to a role in the church by other men, then all that will be achieved are results through human skills and abilities. But a role appointed by God will be supported by the Holy Spirit, and therefore the results will be far different, because the Lord will be confirming that appointment with supernatural signs following.

“All these [the gifts and ministries] are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Therefore, a person is appointed to a role in the church according to his or her gifting. That gifting comes from the Holy Spirit as He distributes gifts according to the will of God. Paul recognises that when people receive their roles in the church from the Holy Spirit, they can have the confidence that God will work with them to achieve His will through them.

This is why each role, from the janitor who cleans the toilets, right up to the most prominent, church-building

apostle, is equally important to God, because He is the one who has appointed that person to that particular role. Because each role is equally important to God, then every member of the Church should honour each other member the same. It all comes down to what the next Scripture reference says:

He [Jesus] answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Luke 10:27).

Loving others includes the way we honour them and their role in the Church. As one writer has pointed out very clearly, that we can measure our love for God by the extent to which we love the least loveable person we know.²³

Therefore, if members of the Church say they love God, then honouring every role in the Church is inseparably connected with it. If members honour the cleaning lady the same as the evangelist, then they are showing their love for God, and the cleaning lady has the assurance that her ministry for the Lord is as important and vital as those ministering from the platform.²⁴

This is also important for new converts, because there are roles for all at each stages of their development. The sooner a new convert develops a sense of the importance

²³ Rodney W Francis; *You Can Measure Your Love For God*; Available from The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry; gfm@gospel.org.nz

²⁴ I want to make the point here that Paul did not recognise the raised platform where privileged members “ministered” to the rest of the church. He did not see the Church as a type of “theatre” with a person on the raised platform giving a performance to a passive audience.

of serving God and establishes a role in the Church, the better. The role that a new convert may perform may be pretty basic at the start, depending on their level of maturity and experience. It is important that “novices” are not given leadership responsibility too soon.

“Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Timothy 3:2,6).

But it is important that new converts are put to work in the Church as soon as possible and not left to be “pew-sitters”, “gathering dust”. They should be taught and encouraged to seek God to find out what He wants them to do as part of the ministry to the Church.

It may be that he can be used as an usher, or as an administration clerk, or someone who greets people at the door. As he proves his faithfulness in that relatively minor role, the Holy Spirit will promote him; but he needs to be patient and wait for promotion from the Lord because then his ministry will be recognised by the whole church.

“For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psalm 75, 6-7, KJV).

“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will

be honored in the presence of all the other guests”
(Luke 14:10)

There are two principles in these Scripture references: first, it is God who appoints a person to a role in the church, and if the role starts off as a particularly minor one, the person needs to be patient within the will of God for him. Actually, there are no small roles in the church, only “small” members.²⁵ The member needs “faith and patience”²⁶ in order to wait on God until He decides to extend the ministry to something more significant, even if it takes many years. Remember the example of Caleb, even though he was one of the two faithful men of God in the face of general unbelief when it came to crossing over into the Promised Land, he had to wait 45 years until his faithfulness was acknowledged, and he was able to cross over to the Land and claim his allotment.

The second point is that one of the signs that a member is being promoted by the Holy Spirit to greater responsibility in the Church is that he/she is invited into the role by the legitimate leadership. Even then, the member approaches the role with humility, not wanting to use the occasion to push him/herself forward further than where the Holy Spirit has placed that member. If the member starts to perform the role at a lower point than appropriate, the Holy Spirit will prompt the leadership to encourage him/her to take a more responsible place in that role.

Now Paul specifies the prominent roles in the ministry of the church. Paul sees these as roles and not titles. We

²⁵ This comes from a famous quote by Constantin Stanislavski, the well-known authority on theatrical performance.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantin Stanislavski](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantin_Stanislawski)

²⁶ Hebrews 6:12

identify these roles as the “five-fold ministries” in the Church. These are what Paul would identify as the “front-line” roles, in the same way as is in the army. There is the infantry and artillery that are directly fighting the enemy. They are the ones who are the most visible, and who are taking the greatest risks.

It is the same in the Church. The “five-fold” ministries are the ones who are directly bringing the Gospel to the lost, confronting the powers of darkness, healing the sick, and encouraging/building up the congregation. These are the ones who are the most prominent in bringing people to faith:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task“(1 Corinthians 3:5).

Then Paul lists the ministries of “helps”. These include the accountants, ushers, janitors, door-greeters, secretaries, counsellors, handy-men, the little grandmas praying in the basement, and all others not named who work behind the scenes to keep the Church running.

He issues the challenge by asking the obvious question: **“Are all apostles?”** (etc.). Are all functioning on the front line? If the whole army was the infantry, who would be there to feed them when they got hungry? Who would be supplying the stores and ammunition? George Patton, the famous United States general in the Second World War, advanced his tanks and troops forward so fast that they outpaced his supply lines, and had to stop the advance until the trucks with his supplies and ammunition were able to catch up.

As more Allied forces arrived in France across a wide front, the 3rd Army, as part of the 12th Army Group under Patton's former subordinate Omar Bradley, advanced in the late Summer and Fall of 1944 through the Lorraine region and across the border into Germany itself. Often, Patton and his army were forced to slow down, not due to resistance from the Germans, but because they had outrun their own supply lines, or in the case of Operation Market-Garden (the trouble-plagued invasion of Holland under the command of Montgomery in September 1944) because supplies had been reduced and diverted.²⁷

This shows that the “back-room” ministries in the Church are just as important as the “front-line” ministries. Paul wanted to make sure that everyone to whom he wrote understood that quite clearly.

He was concerned that because someone was appointed to the role of apostle, that others would be envious, or discouraged that they did not have such an important role. Just because these people were part of the Early Church, it must not be assumed that they had a higher degree of spirituality than anyone at other stages of the Church’s development, or that they had fewer faults and shortcomings than anyone else. The very fact that Paul had to write to the Corinthian Church in order to sort things out with them shows that they had much the same problems as many of our modern churches have today.

The apostle and prophet are the two most responsible roles in the Church, and therefore there are fewer of them, and they, of necessity, have to be mature, experienced and

²⁷ <http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0028822/bio>

humble believers. This can only come through many years of spiritual development and personal fellowship with Christ.

The pastor is also a very responsible role, and not for the novice. He has the responsibility for the well-being of those in the congregation. He is the facilitator, making sure that each role functions well, and is acknowledged. He is the person who equips the saints and helps them find God's will for their role in the Church.

When Paul is saying **“desire the greater gifts”** he is not saying that one role is more important than another. What I think he is saying is that the “greater” gift is the one most appropriate to the person desiring it. We all have different personalities and temperaments, and while one gift may work well with us, another gift may cause us to be a “square peg in a round hole”. Trying to operate in the wrong gifting can be frustrating, discouraging, and finally, fruitless.

Only the individual in fellowship with God knows his own strengths and weaknesses, and also knows the will of God for him/herself. When a person is functioning in the gift that is the will of God, the fruit of the Spirit is most evident, within the individual, and to the people to whom he/she is ministering.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

The characteristics of a gift or ministry being operated according to the will of God and through a person who has received it from the Holy Spirit, rather than through the appointment of some kind of hierarchy, are the same as outlined in the above Scripture reference.

The ministry is performance with love for God and others as the foundation. The definition is found in 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13. Verses 4 and 5 are the central verses that best define how a gift or ministry is performed in love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”

Patient: A person desiring a gift/ministry is patient, waiting on God’s time for Him to prepare and form it within him.

Kind: The gift/ministry is in an attitude of kindness and gentleness, knowing that others are vulnerable and need encouragement, rather than being beaten down – especially when they make mistakes and show their faults and shortcomings.

Does not envy: A person in a Holy Spirit ministry does not look at the gifting of others in a way that causes him/her to view their own gifting as inferior, and therefore does not covet what the other person has or does for the Lord.

Does not boast: A person who has a gift/ministry from the Holy Spirit does not go around trumpeting that they are special because they have a particular gifting that might make them appear more effective than others.

Is not proud: Humility is the essential ingredient in the performance of gifts and ministries through the Holy Spirit. He does not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but thinks soberly and realistically. Also, he does not have false-humility in that he makes himself appear extra humble in order to show how spiritual he is in the sight of others.

Does not dishonour others: This is what we have been discussing previously. The person ministering in the Holy Spirit does not look down his nose at the janitor whose job it is to clean the toilets, but he gives that person due honour because “it is a dirty job and someone has to do it”, and so he honours the janitor because the latter is happy to follow God’s will and do the type of job that may be distasteful to many others. If a fellow who aspires to the role of apostle (perhaps the most prominent of the ministries) was prepared to go through the stage of cleaning the toilets and sweeping the floor, maybe he might end up being a much better apostle because of it.

Not self-seeking: A believer does not force himself into a Holy Spirit ministry. If he did, he would be going right against the will of God, and he would be performing in his own strength, and the fruit of the ministry would be defective.

Not easily angered: Working in a ministry can be very frustrating at times. When we become effective for God, we stir up the enemy because he is threatened. As a result we come up against all sorts of people who will criticise, oppose, and otherwise hinder what we are trying to do for the Lord. We need to remain cool, calm, and collected through those times, knowing that these things are part of the “package”. When we realise that behind the human agency there are spiritual forces, instead of venting anger on the human, we use our authority in Christ to bind and resist the demon that is really causing the trouble.

Does not keep a record of wrongs: A person in a Holy Spirit ministry knows that ordinary people have faults and shortcomings. He knows that they will make mistakes, even big ones that might affect many people and perhaps the whole church. He might be in a role that allows him to

discipline members of the Church. When he does, and the other person shows true repentance, then that is the end of it. He does not hold the incident against the other person, but helps that person move on in God to do things right “the next time.” The following by the apostle Peter covers it admirably: **“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins”**.²⁸

This basically sums up what Paul is saying generally about the Church. What is needed now, is to compare what he has been saying with what is happening in our contemporary churches.

²⁸ 1 Peter 4:8

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THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

In order to diagnose the state of our present Church and to try and find answers to bring the Church back to where it should be in the will of God, we need to compare Paul's view with what is actually happening today.

We need to accept that Paul's view of the church is in total harmony with the Holy Spirit's view, because, as we know, the letters of Paul, including the one to the Corinthian Church, is accepted as a significant part of the Inspired Word of God, having an equal status with all other Scripture, Old and New Testament.

So, Paul's description of the Church as a body made up of various parts, all equally important for the healthy functioning of it, is totally consistent with the will of God for the Church and how it should be, both for believers and unconverted alike.

What we are seeking to determine is whether our present-day Church is in the will of God, because we know that a Church outside of the will of God is a dysfunctional Church.

Although we are primarily concerned with solutions, rather than wallowing around in the Church's problems, we have to work through the problems, examining them in a calm and realistic manner, in order to know what the solutions could be. In the same way that a doctor has to make a diagnosis before prescribing treatment, we have to arrive at a "diagnosis" for the Church in order to put the appropriate measures in place to get to a place where we can be assured that the Church is working in the centre of God's will.

So, in the previous section, we have ascertained what God's will is for the Church. Now we have to see whether,

in the Church, God's will is **“done on earth as it is in Heaven”**.²⁹

Is The Church One Body?

The first thing we see about our present-day Church is that it is divided up into various denominations, the most prominent being the traditional, (Roman Catholic³⁰, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregational, Church of Christ, Lutheran, Open Brethren, Dutch Reformed), the Pentecostal (Assembly of God, Apostolic, Elim, Church of God), Charismatic (too many to name), and other smaller independent, including the Reformed, Free Presbyterian, Grace Presbyterian and “Oneness” churches.³¹

As well as those, there are what I would call the “pseudo Christian” churches³² (Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Exclusive Brethren).

Each of these churches have a basic belief that they are the ones that God favours, and that all the others are not at the same “cutting edge” that they are. Some have a more open attitude about fellowshiping with Christians of the other denominations than others.³³

²⁹ Matthew 6:10

³⁰ I have included this church because, although it has theology that gives equal weight to the Church Fathers and decrees from various popes through the centuries, many view it as the traditional Christian church, and we wouldn't want to offend them.

³¹ “Oneness” churches are those that do not believe in the Trinity, but teach that there is only one God in three different “modes”, and the present “mode” is the Person of Jesus Christ. Some were originally called the “Jesus Only” churches.

³² These are churches that depart in some measure from what we recognise as the central truths of the Gospel as defined by the 13 Articles of the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession.

³³ The Roman Catholic Church holds that every other Christian church is an offshoot of it, and therefore are divisive, while it remains the “true and faithful” Church, in the centre of God's will.

The reality is, that what we are calling the “Body of Christ” when referring to the visible Church, is not the Body of Christ that Paul is advocating, because he is saying that the Church is one Body, and that there is just “one God, one faith, and one baptism”³⁴ So, we are flummoxed right from the start, because of its divisions, the visible Church cannot have its present foundation in the will of God.

The problem goes all the way back to the Corinthian Church where different factions were aligning themselves with the different apostles that were having an influence. Paul recognises the party spirit and does not approve of it. Therefore we can be confident that the Holy Spirit does not approve of “factions” within the Church.

This is the main reason why, in spite of so many godly believers praying for revival – that the Holy Spirit will fall on the Church and have His own way - revival does not come, and the visible Church continues on its way with the problems that continue to plague it.

The main outcome and evidence of revival in a region, and this was made very clear during the revival in Wales in the late Nineteenth Century, is that denominational differences are broken down and Christians fellowship together freely. The revival passes over those churches that refuse to open themselves to a wider fellowship. God will not allow a revival to take place in churches that remain “exclusive” in the sense that they will ignore denominational barriers and freely fellowship with other believers on the basis of their faith in Christ alone.

Where we do see a deeper move of the Holy Spirit is in home fellowships and interdenominational ministries, where believers of a wide diversity of churches come together with a common goal and purpose.³⁵

³⁴ Ephesians 4:5

³⁵ One such home fellowship in a small provincial town experienced a wonderful move of the Spirit, but when it was taken over by a major Pentecostal denomination, the blessing stopped and the church died. Another ministry that I am involved with has remained true to its prophetic vision and remained open to

There are two basic reasons why the division between denominations happened. The first reason is that when the Church started to formalise, groups that wanted to get back to the purity of the New Testament were rejected and treated as heretical by the established church, so they had to separate themselves to preserve the work of the Holy Spirit with them. They did not wish to divide from the established church, but were forced to through the intolerance of the leaders of the church.³⁶ This has persisted right through to the present day with movements that have appeared and been rejected by the established church of the day.

Because of the rejection of the groups by the established church, God has not held their division against them, and they have borne fruit in the conversion of sinners, healing the sick, and deliverance from demons. It is only when another generation has arisen within those new groups and become formalised, that the Holy Spirit has departed from them.

The second reason is that a group of people have deliberately separated from their parent denomination because of doctrinal differences, or that an ambitious person was denied having influence. This is where there is deliberate divisiveness, and I cannot believe that the Holy Spirit would support them. This is probably the reason why most of these new churches have not lasted very long. They are trying to do the work of God in their own strength without the support of the Holy Spirit.

It is quite possible to have a church organisation that continues without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Instead of the Holy Spirit as its foundation, it is kept going by a religious spirit. There may be genuine Christians in

all denominations, ministering in churches of any denomination that invites it, and that ministry has borne good fruit over 50 years of its existence.

³⁶ See *2000 Years Of Charismatic Christianity, A 21st Century look at Church history from a Pentecostal Charismatic perspective*, Eddie L. Hyatt, 2002, Charisma House, for a good account of the way different movements appeared and had to separate from the established Church.

those groups, who are being honoured by the Lord because of their personal faith, and these are the people who are usually praying and interceding for the church, that their leaders may repent and allow the Holy Spirit back to have His way.

There are churches that are exclusive because of a belief that they are the “true church” and that all other churches are apostate. The most extreme of these have their buildings surrounded by high fences, don’t welcome outsiders, have over-strict, sometimes old-fashioned lifestyles, including not associating or eating with outsiders including even other Christian believers (not of their denomination). If anyone decides to leave their denomination, they are cut off from their parents, children, or relatives who remain within the group.

The reality is that there is only one true Church, and it is not the visible one. The true Church is invisible, and it is made up of all those who have embraced Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. They may have great diversities of doctrine, but are in total unity with the central truths of the Gospel and the nature of God. They also have no problem with fellowshiping freely with any other believer who has faith in Jesus Christ. The common ground of fellowship with them is their allegiance to the Lord. These are the ones whom God honours above all others.

Other Issues

In this section, we will ignore the issues that are evident in those churches that are divided because of personal ambition or that they have departed from the central truths of the Gospel; in other words, “sound doctrine”.

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears”
(1 Timothy 4:3, KJV).

There are other churches that have leaderships that are godly, sincere, and wanting the best that God can give them. God looks at their hearts, and finding them sound, is able to overlook some shortcomings in order to bring them closer to His will.³⁷

But these churches have their issues and these are what we are going to examine. We will revisit the Scripture passage at the start of our study and make that the basis of our “diagnosis”.

We have already discussed the principle that the true Church is one Body, having one faith, looking to one God, and recognising only one baptism, and that Christians of any denomination who recognise that and are praying for true Christian unity³⁸ can have the assurance that God is with them and causing them to grow in grace and in dependence on Christ.

The true Church, although one Body, has many parts. Each part has an equally important function. Where this is recognised in churches, the work of God is done in a very harmonious manner. The church is a welcoming place, the services are edifying and encouraging, there is “body ministry” where those who have recognised gifting are able to share what they have through the Spirit to the rest of the group, and the preaching builds up faith and dependence on Christ. Also, the sick get healed, demons get cast out, and unconverted folks are saved.

³⁷ “The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7b).

³⁸ Not union. Union involves believers adopting the same doctrines and practices. This is a religious spirit and does not recognise individual differences. Unity accepts individual differences and bases itself on faith in Christ and adherence to “sound doctrine” (the central truths of the Gospel and the nature of God).

Issues arise when some prominent folks decide that their gifts are superior to others' and decide to take a dominant role in the fellowship.

There is another issue that prevents the Holy Spirit having His free way in our churches, and that is the issue of “power and control”. This occurs both in the church community and in the homes of individual believers. When a church leader, pastor, minister, a church-going spouse or parent exercises power and control over others, whether it is in the Name of Christ or not, this is **religious, or spiritual abuse**.

Church leaders and ministers do not usually resort to physical violence in the way they seek to control their members. They resort more to **psychological violence**. This can be expressed in the way they preach to, counsel or pray for others.

A preacher can preach a sermon with the idea of frightening the listeners into “obedience” and the adoption of his policies. This is controlling by **fear**. Fear is also used in sermons on tithing where the threat is that if people do not give their hard-earned money to the church they will be judged by having to endure poverty.

A prosperity preacher may manipulate the listeners by “hooking into” their desire for wealth – if they give money as a “seed-offering” they will become rich. This activates greed in the listeners. It is the same demon as the one that induces people to gamble at the casino. It is a deception, because there is no evidence that giving money to the church produces wealth, in the same way as not giving money produces poverty. The devil has always been a liar who promises great things but never delivers.

A board of elders can instil fear in a pastor who is dependent on them for his employment. If he goes against their policies, he is likely to be dismissed and therefore lose his living. This is intensified if he has a wife and children to support. Then, the fear is as much for his dependents as for himself.

During a protest march in Auckland, NZ, against the introduction of Civil Union³⁹, a prominent church had a large contingent of black-shirted, physically fit males marching down the street to make its point. This had an intimidating effect on the onlookers, in much the same way as the Nazi and Fascist black-shirts marched in the streets of Berlin and Rome in the 1930s. This was not the act of showing the love of God to the community. It was a glaring example of religious abuse with the aim of controlling the minds of the general community through fear.

The same type of thing can happen in churches that believe in casting out of demons. A manipulating pastor or leader who may have a disagreement with a congregation member, and to control his mind may accuse him of having a demon that needs to be cast out. A person I know was accused by another of having a “spirit of variance” merely because he disagreed on a doctrine that the other person was promoting!⁴⁰

A young convert can be manipulated by those who are disciplining him. They can promise great blessings if he/she obeys what they are teaching him, or spiritual disaster if he/she does not comply. What happens is that the young convert develops a “fear of man”, instead of being allowed to grow in grace in the right way.

A Christian parent can do the same to his/her children. Threats and promises can be used as psychological strategies to instil obedience. This way, the child grows up believing that God is like that – who promises blessings as the result of obedience, or punishment for disobedience.

³⁹ This is an alternative for marriage for gay couples and those who do not wish to go through the formal process of marriage, but recognising the legal status of the partners as if they were married.

⁴⁰ This happened in a Christian flat in 1970. It is interesting that the person who made the accusation was heard to have gone to the local red district under the impression that he could convert them, but instead ended up having sexual encounters with them.

A Christian parent can resort to physical abuse in the form of “discipline”, so that the child learns that the only way to obedience is to be whacked with a stick, or even worse. There are stories of neglect, horrific beatings, confinement, abandonment, even sexual abuse as “discipline” strategies by professing Christian parents.⁴¹ How could God ever bring revival to a church that has parents driving their children away from Christ with such atrocities, especially if they are perpetrated in the Name of Christ!

A lot of this may happen “beneath the surface” of the official services and meetings, and this is why those who are praying for revival in the church wonder why it is so long in coming. But God sees all, and He sees the abuses that are going on behind the scenes, and until these things are put right, He will not bring revival, and the work of the Holy Spirit will be severely hindered.

The “Senior Pastor”

Some church leaderships involve the “senior pastor”. It works well if the role is accepted because the person is a recognised mature and experienced pastoral ministry that has borne good fruit over many years. I guess that Peter, Paul, and Apollos, and the other Apostles were viewed as “senior pastors” when they visited the different churches. I don’t think that there is anything wrong with that, as long as the individual remains humble and aware that the “senior pastor” is a role and not a title. Also, as the senior person in the fellowship, this particular role is more of guiding and encouraging the other pastors, rather than dominating them in front of the congregation. As far as the congregation is concerned, the “senior” pastor is just one of the others, having equal status.

⁴¹ A Christian mother sexually abused her young daughter with a broom handle while at the same time using the most filthy language at her. This and other examples can be found in *The Red Dragon Cast Down*; E. James Wilder; 1999, Chosen Books, p88-89.

I have seen when a “senior pastor” has adopted a dominant role over the other elders in a fellowship. I witnessed a conflict between a certain elder who viewed himself as “senior” to the others, and another elder. The “senior” told the other elder right in front of all the other elders and deacons that “you need spiritual help”, just because that other elder disagreed with what was being proposed.⁴²

There are also issues in a church where the “minister” or the “pastor” (who have adopted the title rather than the role) having dominance over everyone else in the fellowship. This is often accepted because of the mistaken belief that a fellowship needs the oversight and “covering” of one man who has a “special ear” to God, and who is the sole recipient of God’s voice and will for the fellowship.

I have also heard of pastors rebuking members from the pulpit, and in extreme cases, demanding that they leave the church! These are examples, not of the love of Christ, but of religious and spiritual abuse.

I firmly believe that this type of conduct is totally inconsistent with the pastoral role, and would be a major hindrance to harmony within the fellowship and the involvement of the Holy Spirit.

God’s will for the governance of a church is that it is administered by a “presbytery” of elders, each having the different ministries and gifts under the terms of the Five-Fold ministry of the church.⁴³ These are the recognised leaders of the church. One person having the “pre-eminence” over the others was not recognised in the first two centuries of the Church. The emergence of a “senior” person called “The Pastor” or “The Bishop” or any other title that gave the person dominance over the group appeared after the Second Century of the Church, and as titles

⁴² This is a sad example of “religious abuse” that is often found in churches where a leader thinks he is superior to the others.

⁴³ This is not to say that our current Presbyterian Church is the “true” Church!

became more important than roles, the supernatural components of the Gospel faded away.

The appointment of a separate “clergy” in the Church first came about because of the heresies that were invading the fellowships. It was found necessary to install men trained in the “sound” orthodox doctrines of the Church to ensure that people were not tricked into believing heretical doctrines because of their lack of sound doctrinal knowledge.

This evolved over time into a separate, full-time, professional “clergy” that became “teaching” elders, as apart from “ruling” elders.⁴⁴ The problem with many traditional churches is that the “Minister” becomes the ruling authority. It is not always the minister’s fault, because in most churches, the people want it that way. They want to evade their own responsibility for having to be involved in the ministry of the church by “passing the buck” to the person they perceive as being “professionally” trained. Then they will be quick to moan and complain when things don’t go the way they envisaged.

The Pentecostal/Charismatic churches are especially prone to authoritarianism at “the top”, especially if the church has a “pyramid structure”.⁴⁵ I heard of the overall leader of a well-known Pentecostal denomination, who was

⁴⁴ This is still the current governmental practice of the Presbyterian Church.

⁴⁵ A “pyramid structure” of church government is where there is a hierarchy of leaders, with “home-group” leaders governing groups of rank and file members. These in turn are overseen by a “senior” leader. There will be “senior” leaders overseeing different departments in the church; for example: the worship leader, evangelism leader, Sunday School leader, etc. These leaders are called “pastors” in some churches. These leaders are overseen by a “senior pastor” whose role is to have the “vision” and to guide the church generally. He has the final word when it comes to important policy decisions and his authority is unquestioned. Usually the attitude is “my way or the highway”. If the church, like the New Life movement, is part of a cluster of churches under the same banner, an overall “senior pastor” can be appointed to head the whole lot. In some denominations, this person can have the “Bishop” title. In the Roman Catholic Church, the head person is called “The Pope”, and his policy and theological decisions are largely unquestioned.

challenged over an issue by one of the members, retorting: “You can’t talk to me like that. I am an Apostle!”

The problem is that a rank and file member cannot approach the “head honcho” of his church directly if there is an issue that needs attention, or if a doctrine is suspect. He has to bring the matter up with his home-group leader, who is to pass the message on to his immediate overseer. If the home-group leader or the overseer do not agree with the member, they may not prosecute the matter with the same passion, and the issue may be “binned” at that stage.

Also, there can be a conflict between the “priesthood of every believer”,⁴⁶ where every believer has direct access to the risen Christ, according to the promise: **“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”**,⁴⁷ and the demand from some church leaders to view them as God’s spokesperson or His representative to give guidance or forgive sins. There is no indication in the New Testament that any believer has an obligation to approach God through a church leader. In fact, the Scripture is quite clear about a believer’s access to the Lord: **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”**⁴⁸

A pastor who is aware of the will of God and who is working in harmony with the Holy Spirit will see himself as a facilitator, encouraging the members to have a personal dependence on Christ and to find the will of God for themselves. He will not dictate what he thinks is the will of God for them. He will know that he would have no right to do that. He will also encourage the members to seek God to find their own gifting, and then guide them into the appropriate ways of expressing that gifting in the life of the church. He knows that he does not have a special ear to

⁴⁶ “You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10).

⁴⁷ Hebrews 4:16

⁴⁸ 2 Timothy 2:5

God for everyone, and that his role is not an authoritarian one. He also knows that spiritual authority is over sickness and demons, and not to take control of the members' minds or spiritual lives.

All Ministries and Gifts Are Vital

Paul's view of roles within the life of the church was that every single member of the group had a vital role to perform, whether it be of great honour, or right down the bottom of the honour scale. He also spoke of members themselves, recognising that some were further along the sanctification road than others. He viewed that every single member of the group was vitally important to the group and should never feel inferior or "useless" because they lack experience or do not have the same gifting or in the same social group as other more influential members.

James echoed much the same sentiment:

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ James 2:1-5

There are quite a number of churches that would welcome a wealthy person who promises to be a good financial contributor, and be more likely to give him a position of responsibility in the church, than someone with no financial resources who just walked in off the street and gave his life to Christ. I have seen it happen in a church where some had been members for years before they were made deacons, and a wealthy businessman walks in having just accepted Christ and he is made a deacon more or less straight away.

There are stories of churches having their services televised, and so the ushers make sure that it is all the well-dressed members are the ones in range of the cameras, and the more poorly dressed are repositioned so they don't appear.

There are churches that have two major social groups: the "elite", central social group around the pastors and elders, and the group "in need of counselling". Appointments to responsible roles are taken from the "elite" or those perceived to have "arrived", while those who do not fit as well into the accepted policy structure are "passed over". This means that the leadership of the church is a respecter of persons, opposed to God's attitude in that He is no respecter of persons, but will use anyone who is available, for His glory.⁵⁰

In churches that believe that the supernatural gifts ceased when the last Apostle died, will not accept prayer for the sick, deliverance, prophecy, or the operation of any of the other supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Their attitude is that these things are no longer needed in the Church because "we have the complete Scriptures".

But the fact remains that the Holy Spirit has provided resources for the building up of the church, and these include the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. Without these resources there is no guarantee that the church will grow in grace and in fellowship with God. Also, it will have little

⁵⁰ "Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34).

influence in the community around it. It is no wonder that many churches are declining because of the erroneous belief that people who have roles involving the supernatural gifts of the Spirit are not needed.

If a church decides that it doesn't need those with the gift of prophecy, then it misses out on the "love letters" from God that so many members need from week to week. It means that important confirmation of personal guidance is not available, and that there is no facility for exhortation, building-up, or comfort for the members. Attempts to achieve the same results by natural means falls short, and too many members remain sickly, discouraged, and exposed to unnecessary suffering, when a timely word of prophecy from the Holy Spirit would have made such a wonderful difference.

If a church does not embrace those with the gift of discerning of spirits, it misses out on being able to discern whether it is the Holy Spirit or a contrary spirit is motivating behaviour or attempts to influence the fellowship. A whole area of deliverance ministry is ignored because there is no-one present to detect the activity of demons in the congregation.

It is the same with the gifts of healing. Members remain sick and die before their time because there is no facility or opportunity to minister healing to them. Sick people are sent off to the doctor, because the leadership has more faith in the medical profession than in the power of God to heal people. If they do pray, their prayer includes "if it be your will", which is actually a prayer of unbelief, because Jesus made it quite clear that it is His will to heal sick people.⁵¹

There are other churches that enforce strict silence on women in the church. They will not accept women

⁵¹ "A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy" (Matthew 8:2-3).

ministers/pastors, and will not let women speak in the meetings. In this way they are demonstrating that they believe that women's ministry is not needed in their churches. Although Paul has not directly referred to women's roles as vital parts of the body, nevertheless they are essential parts of the Church and their contribution should be recognised. Remember that Phillip the Evangelist had four daughters who prophesied.⁵² Where else would they have performed their role except in the Church meetings?

The prohibition of women's ministry in these churches is based on a misquote of 1 Corinthians 14:34. Paul was dealing with a particular social problem in the Corinthian church meetings where the women kept on being a distraction by asking questions and interrupting the flow of the Spirit. It was a particular problem to do with that church, because Paul does not mention it elsewhere in his letters. This means that the other churches did not have that particular problem. Paul does limit women teaching or having authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12), but this does not limit women's ministry under the oversight of the male elders. A woman can be a minister/pastor without contravening Paul's instructions because that role can be performed under the oversight of a board of elders, where that board is the governing authority of the church. There would be a problem with a woman pastor if the governmental structure involved the pastor at the "top of the pyramid" in that type of church, and not accountable to a male leadership.

⁵² Acts 21:9

WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHURCH?

In this segment it will be good to look at the church where you attend and examine it according to Paul's view of the Church, and some of the issues that are present in our contemporary Church. We won't examine types of denominations or structures of church government, because revivals have occurred in churches of every evangelical denomination and with diverse governmental structures. But we will look at issues arising out of these different governmental structures.

It was accepted by the Church Fathers that some governmental measures were added, even though they were not specified in the New Testament Scripture, but were necessary additions to preserve "decency and order" in the Church.⁵³

We have already discussed the reasons for the formation of our traditional denominations and have concluded that they were formed because of the rejection of members by the established church of the time and not because of a divisive attitude on the part of those who had to form their own groups to advance the will of God in their generation.

It is accepted that God is not limited by variations of church government, whether they be elder-run, clergy/laity, or pyramid-style, as long as those who have the responsibility for governing are godly, have the will of God as their priority, and have true and sincere hearts before

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 14:40

God, having no personal ambition or self-seeking in the way they set out governing their fellowships.

But there are other issues that certainly limit the work of the Holy Spirit in churches, and it is important that the reader does an honest assessment of his/her church to see if there are issues that might be preventing the Holy Spirit from having freedom in the direction and growth of the church.

We are assuming that your church is a godly, evangelical, (including Pentecostal/Charismatic but not necessarily so) fellowship that seeks to shepherd its members and have an influence in the community;

1. Looking at your church governmental structure:

Is it clergy/laity, elder-run, pyramid?

What are the main advantages of the structure?

Did the particular structure help you to progress “up the ranks” of your church into a responsible/leadership role rapidly? Why, or why not?

The disadvantages?

In your observation, might the disadvantages hinder the spiritual growth of your fellow church members?

If you felt called of God to a particular role, were you hindered in performing that role? How?

If you had the choice of the type of governmental structure to have in your church, which one would you choose if you wanted it to change?

Have you ever had the opportunity to comment on the advantages/disadvantages of your current governmental structure? What was the response? Was it accepted? Why/why not?

Have you ever had pressure placed on you to be silent, or to leave your church because you have questioned the validity of your church governmental structure? Specify.

If you are a woman (married or single), has your gender limited you in your godly calling? If so, specify.

2. Let's now examine the pastoral role of your church.

Is your minister/pastor the sole leader in your church?
If so, how confident would you be to question him/her if you believe that wrong doctrine was being preached or advocated?

How would you rate your minister/pastor in terms of "authority"?

Authoritarian;

Democratic;

Easy-going;

Anything Goes?

How would you rate his preaching style? Give explanations for your answer.

Expository;

Topical ;

Could be either, academic but encouraging;

Purely academic and knowledge-based;

Not Scripture-based but mentions some Christian principles;

What is your level of interest when you listen to his preaching?

Riveting and faith-building, could listen to him all day;

Interesting as long as he doesn't go on too long;

Has a few boring moments, but tolerable;

Largely irrelevant and boring;

Groaning!

As a pastor, how approachable is he for answering questions and arranging counselling?

Overall, do you feel that he is called by God as a pastor, or is he there because he has been appointed

by the hierarchy of the church? Give reasons for your answer.

3. Your involvement/ministry in the church.

Do you feel called of God to a ministry in the church? Specify.

What level are you at? You may be involved in more than one at the same time.

New convert under training;

Involved in the ministry of helps (specify);

Counselling;

Preaching;

Deacon;

Home-group leader;

Elder;

Evangelist;

Prophetic ministry;

Healing ministry;

Deliverance ministry.

How do you rate your ministry? Are you waiting on God for greater responsibility?

What prospects are there for advancement? Specify.

Do you believe that the janitor role is a bona fide ministry in your church?

Who cleans the toilets?

If there is an “elite” social group in your church, would they clean the toilets if requested?

Would YOU clean the toilets if requested?

How do you feel about your present involvement/ministry?

Eminently satisfied and fulfilled;

Content and satisfied that I am making a difference;

Content but praying for greater responsibility;

Unsatisfied, hindered, blocked in some way, but able to do some things;

Quite unhappy, pew-sitting, totally blocked from any type of ministry.

Are there any opportunities for ministry outside the church (for example, in an interdenominational ministry of some kind).

Have you ever experienced/witnessed religious or spiritual abuse in your church? Specify.

4. Your future in your church.

Where do you see yourself in five years time?

Will you still be attending this particular church?

What is encouraging you to stay?

What would be your reasons for finding another church?

What would you like to see changed for you to feel that you can stay?

5. Promoting your church.

Would you invite your friends to your church?

Would you invite unsaved people? Why/why not?

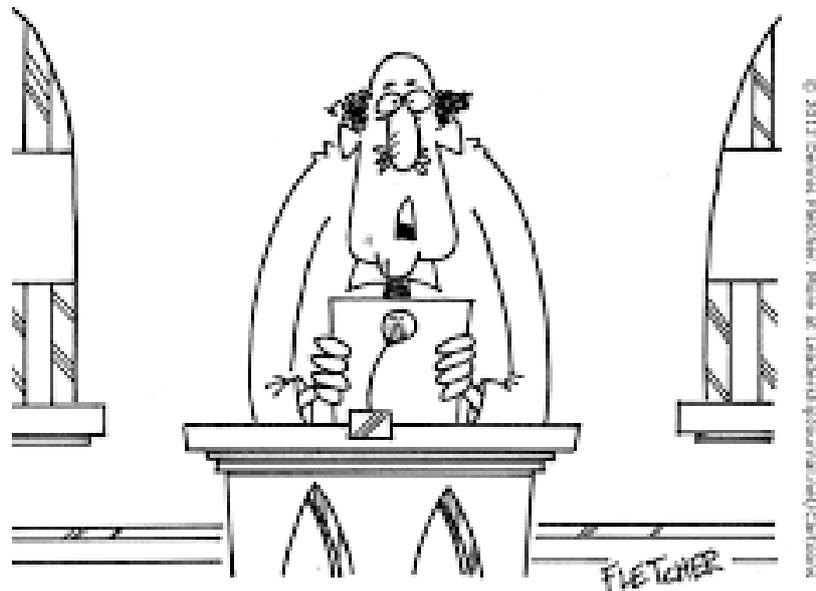
If a friend who is seeking a good church to attend, what would you say about your church?

If an unsaved person asked to come to church with you, what would you say to them?

Does your church have many visitors each Sunday?

How many of them stay to become regular attenders?

Give comments.



“ ... and the church unity workshop has been postponed until the deacons can agree on the date, time, and color of the participant’s name tags.”

CONCLUSION

There are no easy solutions to the issues that have arisen in our present-day churches. Members who are dissatisfied with the state of the churches have a number of options: they can: “bury their heads in the sand” and continue going Sunday after Sunday, hoping for the best; get involved in interdenominational ministries and basically ignore the work of their home church; manipulate the system to rise to a leadership position where they can have a greater influence in the future direction of the church; moan, criticise and complain to anyone who will listen in the hope that enough members will agitate enough to induce the leadership to consider change; leave the church and find one more suitable to their aspirations/calling. But none of these are very positive or helpful, and could further hinder the work of the Holy Spirit, and could actually cause a division in the church.

The purpose of this study has been to make the reader aware of what the New Testament teaches about the nature of the type of church that has the free and full involvement of the Holy Spirit. In this, we have surveyed the origins and development of the Church through the Old and New Testaments, Paul’s view of the Church in what he wrote to the Corinthians to deal with problems that arose in that church, the issues that we identify in our present-day Church, and an invitation to make your response to issues in your own church.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The most important thing that we need to be aware of is that we need to be in the Spirit and not try and accomplish

things in our own strength. All that will result is frustration, discouragement and weariness. We need to remember the Scripture: **“So he said to me, 'This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty”**⁵⁴ This means that putting things right in the Church has to involve the Holy Spirit.

It is also more than just the involvement of the Holy Spirit with what we want to do to bring the glory of God back to the Church. We cannot tell the Holy Spirit what to do. He tells us what He wants us to do.

1. So, firstly, we must be constantly in fellowship with God so we can be sensitive to His voice and to know what God wants to do and how He wants to do it. It is not a matter of saying, “Lord, we want to do this, or that, and we want You to support us.” That will not work at all. We need to be yielded to God, and ask, “What do you want us to do, Lord?”

Notice that when Paul was converted, he did not rush out and try to commence a ministry for the Lord in his own strength or ability. He had all the natural skills and knowledge to set up something that might have worked well, but He knew that he had met the Lord, and that the fruit of using his natural skills and experience was to persecute the Church and bring suffering and distress to believers in Christ. So, his first response was: **“Lord, what do you want me to do?”**⁵⁵

This has to be our first response when confronted with the need of the whole Church, and our local church to come back to a place where the Holy Spirit can move freely, that the glory of God will come into the services, and the gifts of the Spirit will flow freely. We need to go into the presence of God and ask,

⁵⁴ Zechariah 4:6

⁵⁵ Acts 9:6

“What do you want us to do?” And then we need to wait on God until He speaks to us and gives a clear indication about how to proceed.

Waiting on God is not being passive. We have a number of activities that the Scripture is quite clear about that we should be doing. We don't put these on hold. We continue regular private prayer, Bible study, reading good Christian literature, caring and helping others, performing our current role in the fellowship.

2. We need to “break up the fallow ground” in ourselves.⁵⁶ This means that we need to allow the search-light of the Holy Spirit to search through all the areas of our lives and reveal to us what needs to be put right in us. “Lord, send a revival, and start the work in me”.⁵⁷ There is a price to pay, and nothing will happen in the spiritual realm until we are prepared to yield to the Holy Spirit and put right what He reveals to us that need putting right.⁵⁸
3. Know where you stand in Christ. When you have the absolute assurance that you can stand before Christ without any sense of guilt, shame or inferiority, and that you can come boldly to the Throne of Grace at any time, and that you are totally covered by the Righteousness of Christ, it is very difficult for the devil to defeat you.

⁵⁶ Hosea 10:12. Charles Grandison Finney; *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*; 1835, Leavitt, Lord, & Co. Reprinted at <http://books.google.co.nz/books>.

⁵⁷ From the hymn: *Search Me O God And Know My Heart Today*.

⁵⁸ A. A. Allen; *The Price Of God's Miracle Working Power*; is one of the best guides to what the Holy Spirit expects of us if we want to see the glory of God fall on our services, and for God to confirm His Word with supernatural signs, such as healing and deliverance. This book is now in the public domain and can be downloaded from: <http://ebookbrowse.com/the-price-of-gods-miracle-working-power-pdf-d76379509>.

“I have found one thing true about every defeated Christian I have worked with. None of them knew who he or she was in Christ nor understood what it means to be a child of God.”⁵⁹

This is the way you can find your true identity in Christ. If you have based your decisions on fear, either of consequences or of what others think of you; when you realise where you stand in Christ, then you move from fear to love, because you learn the depth of God’s love for you, and **“there is no fear in love because perfect love casts out all fear.”**⁶⁰ Also, living your life based on fear is living outside of the influence of the Holy Spirit. **“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”**⁶¹ At the same time as giving us the revelation of where we stand in Christ, we are delivered from the controlling spirit of fear and now brought into line with the Holy Spirit in how we order our lives and our involvement in church.

4. The healthy way of promoting the freedom of the Holy Spirit to have His way in our churches is to keep away from anything that would cause dissention among believers. When Paul went to Corinth he was determined not to get involved in controversy and **“determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified”** (1 Corinthians 2:2).
5. A distraction of the devil is to get embroiled in the social and political issues that are in the world. Jesus told Pilate that if His kingdom were of this world, His disciples would fight for it (John 18:36). Satan is the

⁵⁹ Dr Neil. T Anderson, in the foreword to *The Red Dragon Cast Down*; E. James Wilder; 1999, Chosen Books, p10.

⁶⁰ 1 John 4:17

⁶¹ 2 Timothy 1:7, ESV

god of this world, and getting involved in secular social and political issues is trying to solve them by natural means. Paul said, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile”** (Romans 1:16). So, the way to deal with these issues is to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons. In this way, sinners come to Christ, start to live holy lives, and the issues in the world take care of themselves.

One thing to remember about these points is that they are not the components of a formula for automatic revival. They are there to prepare YOU to be a fully functional, loving, caring, effective member of your church. God is sovereign and He works things out according to His own will, plans and purposes.

There may be wider issues that God is dealing with than just your particular church. Also, revival might break out in the church down the road as a result of your prayers and faith, so just because it doesn't happen to your church first, there is no need to make the mistake of thinking that your prayers and faith have failed, God does not care about your church, or there is the presence of “sin in camp” that might be preventing the Holy Spirit from initiating revival through your church. But if the glory of God falls on the church down the road, being personally prepared will make it more likely that the glory will spread to your church as well.

Also remember the experience of Daniel, that he prayed for three weeks, and the angel who came to him informed him that God had heard his prayer as soon as he prayed it, but the regional principality, the Prince of Persia, withstood the messenger getting through with the answer and a spiritual battle in the heavenlies resulted, causing the delay until the principality was beaten back to allow the messenger to get through.⁶²

⁶² Daniel 10:4-14

Things are no different in this day and age. There are still spiritual battles going on in the spiritual world over what is happening in the church. Angels are appointed by God to “minister to the saints”.⁶³ This involves fighting against armies of demons who are attacking the Church, and they are activated by the prayers of godly men and women who are concerned about the spiritual state of the Church and who are pleading God to send revival.

God hears those prayers immediately, and because He desires revival more than any of us, despatches armies of angels to enter into combat with the powers of darkness to clear the way for revival to happen. This can take weeks, months, or years, depending on the power of the principality over the particular region involved.

The authority that has been given to every believer is backed up by the Lord and His angels, and when a believer binds a particular demon, the angels are there with chains to take that demon into custody. If believers in a region bind enough demons so that the principality senses that too many of his troops are being lost, and his army weakened, he may back away, allowing revival to happen. This is why the prayers and use of spiritual authority of believers is so important for the life and health of the Church.

So let's get prepared, and then use God's resources, then we will have a Church that the Holy Spirit will love and enjoy working with!

⁶³ “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).

READING LIST

Rediscovering God's Church; Derek Prince; 2006; Whitaker House.

How To Change Your Church (without killing it); Alan Nelson & Gene Appel; 2000; W Publishing Group.

Biblical Eldership; An urgent call to restore Biblical church leadership; Alexander Strauch; 1995; Lewis & Roth.

If you are affected in some way, as a victim, witness, or counsellor, with spiritual/religious abuse, the following resources may be of help.

Spiritual Abuse; Jeannie Cochrane; A Research Project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Spiritual Directors' Training Programme of Spiritual Growth Ministries
(www.sgm.org.nz).

Abusive Churches:

The following books deal with churches that can be toxic to godly believers. Not all churches are totally toxic, and some have toxic areas and people in them. These books describe the type of abuse and bullying that can happen in churches, and how this affects individual believers. If you want a better understanding of spiritual bullying and abuse in churches and how to get free of the effects of spiritual abuse, then these books will have great value for you.

Breaking Intimidation, John Bevere, 1995, Charisma House

Churches That Abuse, Ronald M Enroth, 1992, Zondervan

Damaged Disciples, Ron and Vicki Burks, 1992, Zondervan

The Subtle Power Of Spiritual Abuse, David Johnson & Jeff Vanvonderen, 1991, Bethany House

Why I Stayed, The choices I made in my darkest hour, Gayle Haggard, with Angela Hunt, 2010, Tyndale House

I included this book, because it gives a valuable insight on how a pastor can fall from grace, and then repent, but then having to deal with a judgmental church leadership. What makes this book insightful is that it is written by Ted Haggard's wife, and therefore I believe lacks any self-justification of any kind, which might appear in a book by Ted himself. I believe that this is the most accurate description of the events, and gives me the confidence that even when a pastor falls like this, there is forgiveness and restoration.

Setting Your Church Free, Neil T Anderson & Charles Mylander, 1994. Regal

Toxic Faith, Stephen Arterburn & Jack Felton, 1991, Shaw Books

Twisted Scriptures, A path to freedom from abusive churches, Mary Alice Chrnalogar, 1997, Whitaker House

The Gospel Faith Messenger

Founder: Rodney Francis

For more articles on the Holy Spirit and His ways, please feel free to contact Paul, or The GFM Ministry

To be placed on the E-Mailing List of The Gospel Faith Messenger Ministry, to receive their monthly “Prayer Support Letter” and “Barnabas Bulletin” as well as the less frequent “Faith Messages”; and/or to receive the first Lesson of the “St John’s Gospel” free Bible Correspondence Court Lesson (in either King James Version or New International Version of the Bible – please state your preference), please send you name and address, plus E-Mail address, to:

"The Gospel Faith Messenger" Ministry
P.O Box 57,
Paraparaumu 5254,
NEW ZEALAND.
Telephone: 0064 4 904 0727
Facsimile: 0064 4 904 0726





Paul Christensen

I first became a Christian in an Assembly Of God church in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, in 1966, under the ministry of Trevor Chandler. This was the first time I realized that I needed to make a definite, personal commitment to Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I guess I heard the voice of Christ in my heart then, but did not have the maturity to recognize it as such, but I obeyed it and that is the main thing.

About two years later, I felt the need to have a closer relationship with God as a person and set out to seek him more earnestly. One night, in the middle of a golf course, in desperation, I told Him that people had been able to introduce me to church, Bible Study, prayer, appropriate Christian living, etc., but no one had been able to introduce me directly to God. So, I said “I am Paul, and you are God, and I am very pleased to meet you.” Immediately, I felt as though I were lit up inside, and I heard Him say, “Paul, we have been waiting for this for a long time.” It was a comforting, assuring voice that spoke deep in the back of my mind. This has continued from that time until this.

I am now an Elder of St Aidan’s Presbyterian Church in Conifer Grove in Auckland. I am also involved in The Gospel Faith Messenger ministry with its Prophetic Equipping Days and other outreaches, seeking to empower Christians to hear and recognize the Voice of God making His will clear to them. It is with this in mind that I trust that this booklet will be of assistance to you.

