

**Confessions of a  
Reformed  
Church Growth  
Consultant**



LYLE ASSOCIATES

# Helping To Build Healthy Churches

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## Introduction

Serving the church is a privilege. It is also a sacred trust. When this trust is misused the consequences are destructive to the Body of Christ and the name of Jesus Christ is maligned. When convinced by Scripture that sound doctrine is being contradicted, even with the best of intentions, it must be reported and confessed. This author starts with himself. This treatise is a confession by one who has been privileged to observe Christ's church for over twenty years as a church growth consultant. Many advocates of the church growth movement who sincerely believe they are serving the cause of Christ faithfully and biblically will not share the conclusions drawn by this author. It is not the intent to condemn them or to indicate that God is not using their efforts to further His purposes. "For we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."<sup>1</sup> God is sovereign and His will, will be done, on earth as it is in heaven in His time. However, we who serve the church make many mistakes and will be held accountable as teachers.

Truth matters. Error has consequences that cannot be avoided except by God's grace. Therefore, much grace is required. Doing church God's way is crucial to the proper working of the Body as it builds itself up in love. We are admonished to not be:

"...tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, church growth is the result of the "working properly" of each part the Body of Christ as God designed each to function for the edification of the whole Body for God's glory. Church health is the result of each part "working properly" building the whole Body up in love. God adds those who are being saved.

This author's theological pilgrimage is no different than many others who have come to faith in Christ, been disciples in an Arminian tradition and then came to understand the Scriptures from a reformed theological perspective. The perspective on the church presented is the result of this shift in theological beliefs combined with the privileged opportunity to observe the church through the eyes of a trained church growth consultant. From this perspective it has become apparent that doctrine and methods are interdependent.

For instance, the strategies and ways of doing church advocated by the church growth movement (CGM) are rooted in Arminian theology. The father of the church growth movement is Donald McGavran who from an Arminian perspective said, "Among God's own ways of persuading is this: that He persuades through our efforts."<sup>3</sup> From an Arminian view of man, each person must decide by an act of his or her free will to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. Thus, removing all hindrances to one making this decision is crucial to completing the

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:28. ESV.

<sup>2</sup>Eph. 4:13-16. ESV.

<sup>3</sup> Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 43.

“Great Commission.” McGavran believed strongly that God wants His lost sheep found and folded into Christ’s church using any righteous means of persuasion. He developed a methodology for growing churches based on sociological and statistical models. Hindrances to growth were identified and removed.

## Making of A Church Growth Consultant

A church growth consultant shares a lot in common with the Wizard of Oz. The Wizard represents hope for Dorothy and her friends. Each comes with a “felt need.” Dorothy desires to go home, tin man desires a heart, scarecrow a brain and the lion courage. The Wizard evaluates their strengths and gives them encouragement that they can achieve what they desire if they follow his advice. They take his advice seriously because he seems to be a practical source of wisdom, knowledge and “mighty works.” Eventually, they learn that behind the wizard’s all-wise façade is one like themselves whose only power was to help them believe in themselves. The wizard met their “felt needs” with self-help. The church growth movement offers the same, but at a huge price – the loss of a God dependent ministry. The Laodicean church made the same mistake. They became self-sufficient needing nothing, even to the point of locking Jesus outside the church. “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus counseled them to receive from Him true riches, white garments to cover their shame and salve for their eyes so that they may see. The Laodicean church was blinded by worldly success and reliance on worldly methods. Their only hope for a “well done good and faithful servant” was in the words of Jesus: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”<sup>5</sup> This holds equally true for the church growth consultant and the churches led to put their trust in the pragmatism of church growth principles. “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.”<sup>6</sup>

### History

In the nineteen seventies and eighties Fuller Seminary was the Mecca of the church growth movement. Donald McGavran, considered the father of the CGM, established the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary in nineteen sixty-five. Shortly thereafter, Win Arn, mentored by Wagner and McGavran founded the Church Growth Institute in Pasadena. This institute became a source of practical church growth help for churches desiring to grow. Win Arn marketed and put into practice the church growth theories and methods developed by Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner. As church growth publications began to multiply so did the demand for practitioners who could come along side of church leaders and help them put into practice church growth principles. And it worked. Dozens of churches grew in attendance as the result of church growth analysis, prescription and application of principles of growth.

Just as the revivalist Charles Finney had boasted a hundred years before that given the use of “constituted means” he could hold evangelistic meeting where hundreds would make a decision to receive Jesus Christ as Savior, so the church growth movement boasted that church growth was possible by the use of scientific

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<sup>4</sup> Rev. 3:14-22. ESV.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 3:19. ESV.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. 2:5. ESV.

methodologies. Soon churches of mega size began to multiply growing from a few hundred to a few thousand in just a few years. One young Southern Baptist pastor using church growth principles by the numbers started a church in Orange County California. He boasted that he was building a church of twenty thousand. Many disbelieved, but when his boasts began to be realized hundreds of pastors jammed the church growth seminars hosted by the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth where Pastor Rick Warren was the featured speaker. His congregation, using church growth principles, grew rapidly and the Saddleback Church story spread making Rick Warren the poster boy for the church growth movement. Recently, Saddleback Community Church celebrated their 20,000<sup>th</sup> baptism with a membership of over 30,000. Pastor Warren is also the product of the Southern Baptist movement which has a tradition of using “constituted means” to provoke a “decision” initiated by one’s free will and the persuasion of the preacher during the worship service. Moreover, once one “calls upon the name of the Lord” God is obligated by His own promise to save. Therefore, it was a small step for Warren to embrace the principles of the CGM, which has led to his success. He sincerely believes what he is doing is biblically correct and he is one of the best examples of the success of the CGM.

The Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth (formally the Charles E. Fuller Evangelistic Association) redirected by Peter Wagner, became the premier church growth-consulting arm of the Fuller Seminary Church Growth theory and teaching. In 1981 the first formal church growth consultant training was offered. It was a two-year program consisting of classroom teaching and on-site practice in which each consultant trainee performed a *Diagnostic Analysis* with four churches. The analysis revealed what the churches needed to do to grow. Completion of this training resulted in a certificate from the Fuller Institute, and for some, an Associate Field Consultant relationship with the Fuller Institute. As requests came in to the Fuller Institute from churches asking for help implementing church growth principles these field consultants were sent. This author was one in the first group to receive a certificate of completion and Associate Consultant business card from the Fuller Institute resulting in twelve years of his serving churches across the U.S. and Canada as a church growth field consultant with the Fuller Institute and eleven years as a church consultant with Lyle Associates.

### **Privileged View of The Church**

A church growth consultant sees the best of times and the worst of times experienced by the local church. He is given a privileged view of the church as it functions with different denominational traditions, geographical locations, ethnic cultures, liturgies, socio-economic lifestyles and varying views of the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. He is positioned as a concerned learner that brings the objectivity of an outsider that has observed the church in the best of times and the worst of times. He functions as an interventionist that holds up a mirror for a congregation to see its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based upon the analysis he makes recommendations for removing hindrances to growth and prescribes actions that will lead to change. In most cases if the church is willing to pay the price it can grow. The biggest price is change. The question that must be answered is what changes and what means are legitimate in light of Scripture.

### **The Best of Times**

The best of times are when the gathered Body of Christ experiences biblical worship with a focus on God and His sovereign grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. The whole counsel of God is proclaimed. Those God is drawing to himself attend these worship times and are convicted of their sin and perceive that God is truly in the midst of His people. Their spiritual eyes are opened as God’s Spirit regenerates their minds and hearts leading to repentance and receiving of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The gathered saints rejoice, as do the angels that another who was lost is found and has passed from death to life. Nothing encourages the saints like the new birth of one dead in trespasses and sin made alive by the power of the gospel.

The best of times are also seen as every member of the Body is being equipped to participate in the building up of the Body of Christ His Church. Biblical discipleship leads to members able to live in the world but not be of the world. Their faculties are trained to discern good and evil. They hate what God hates and they love what God loves and He is not ashamed to call them his own. The reign of Christ over their lives is seen by the world and is a sweet smelling aroma to some and the stench of death to others. Jesus Christ is exalted and the whole counsel of God is proclaimed resulting in God adding to their numbers those who are being saved. There is an understanding that they are saved from God's wrath and judgment by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone to live thereafter for God's glory alone.

### **The Worst of Times**

The worst of times are when internal strife and divisions tear apart the fellowship of the Body of Christ. The unity and love of the church is lost and the world cannot see or hear the truth. The name of Christ is maligned and the church loses it "first love." As bad as this is to observe, an even more sinister condition affects the spiritual health of the Body of Christ when biblical worship is exchanged for a man centered gathering patterned after the world, i.e. when the "worship" service is designed by the dictates of the world and rationalized as evangelism. Church growth advocates justifying this eclipse of biblical worship quote the Apostle Paul, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."<sup>7</sup> This only begs the question of what worship is biblically. It is not evangelism, it is not for unbelievers, it is for God offered by those who share the life of His Son. When corporate worship is exchanged for evangelism the souls of the saints dry up and the Body of Christ becomes spiritually sick.<sup>8</sup> Spiritual death results as described by Jesus, "You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead."<sup>9</sup> A church that replaces biblical worship with anything is dead spiritually. When what is essential is replaced with even a good thing (evangelism) the soul of the church body dies. This sinister deception has captured much of the evangelical church in the last thirty years. The church becomes "like so many, peddlers of God's word" marketing the gospel to the unchurched while robbing the saints of biblical worship. Scripture clearly teaches that true seekers are those God draws for ultimately there is only one who seeks – God.<sup>10</sup>

### **Note:**

The following chapters are a compilation of several short papers and therefore have some repetition of ideas. The author felt this repetition underscores several important themes therefore they were left in.

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<sup>7</sup> I Cor. 9:2). ESV.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 873.

<sup>9</sup> Rev 3:). ESV.

<sup>10</sup> Jn. 4:23 & Rom. 3:11. ESV.

## Chapter

# 1

## Theology Shapes Methods

In search of a more biblical way to complete the “Great Commission” this author was drawn to a reformed theological perspective. He discovered a difference in presuppositions starting with the doctrine of man. The Scripture is understood to teach that all are dead in trespasses and sin, therefore, man is unable to “make a decision” until first regenerated by God. This led to an understanding that God is the seeker not man. No person comes to Jesus Christ knowing He is Savior and Lord except God first regenerate him or her. Regeneration is being raised from the dead spiritually and enabled to understand spiritual things.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the focus of worship is God by those gathered as the Body of Christ the church. Those Gentiles that God draws to a worship service will be convicted of sin by God’s Spirit through the preaching of the gospel not by methods of persuasion devised by man. Discovering God’s methods for growing His church is the purpose of this treatise. Repenting of methods rooted in an Arminian view of the task clears the way for doing church God’s way and kingdom growth as God adds those who are being saved to His church.

Reformed theology condemned arminianism at the Council of Dordt in 1619. Today, Reformed theology stands opposed to the “constituted means” of Finney, to the Church Growth movement and to any other method of evangelism that is dependent upon anything except the power of the gospel preached faithfully “as once and for all delivered to the saints.” Dr. Michael Horton, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California, has documented the legacy of Charles Finney. He has shown how the influence of Finney’s theology and “constituted means” shaped the CGM (see the extensive notes below).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> I Cor. 2:12-16.

<sup>12</sup> Finney, Charles, as quoted in Michael S. Horton , “The Legacy of Charles Finney” (Modern Reformation Magazine: 1995, January/February Issue, Vol. 4.1). "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means--as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means." The belief that the new birth and revival depend necessarily on divine activity is pernicious. "No doctrine," he says, "is more dangerous than this to the prosperity of the Church, and nothing more absurd" (*Revivals of Religion* [Revell], pp.4-5). When the leaders of the church growth movement claim that theology gets in the way of growth and insist that it does not matter what a particular church believes: growth is a matter of following the proper principles, they are displaying their debt to Finney. When leaders of the Vineyard movement praise this sub-Christian enterprise and the barking, roaring, screaming, laughing, and other strange phenomena on the basis that "it works" and one must judge its truth by its fruit, they are following Finney as well as the father of American pragmatism, William James, who declared that truth must be judged on the basis of "its cash-value in experiential terms."

Within Reformed churches, the emphasis for evangelism is on the power of the “gospel of God’s grace” faithfully and fully proclaimed.<sup>13</sup> Those who respond by faith are baptized and taught to obey all Jesus commanded. Faith is a gift of God’s grace. No unregenerated person makes a decision to be “born again” spiritually any more than he or she decides to be born physically.<sup>14</sup>

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Jerry Falwell calls him "one of my heroes and a hero to many evangelicals, including Billy Graham." I recall wandering through the Billy Graham Center some years ago, observing the place of honor given to Finney in the evangelical tradition, reinforced by the first class in theology I had at a Christian college, where Finney's work was required reading. The New York revivalist was the oft-quoted and celebrated champion of the Christian singer Keith Green and the Youth With A Mission organization. Finney is particularly esteemed among the leaders of the Christian Right and the Christian Left, by both Jerry Falwell and Jim Wallis (Sojourners' magazine), and his imprint can be seen in movements that appear to be diverse, but in reality are merely heirs to Finney's legacy. From the Vineyard movement and the church growth movement to the political and social crusades, televangelism, and the Promise-Keepers movement, as a former Wheaton College president rather glowingly cheered, "Finney lives on!"

"Thus, in Finney's theology, God is not sovereign; man is not a sinner by nature; the atonement is not a true payment for sin; justification by imputation is insulting to reason and morality; the new birth is simply the effect of successful techniques, and revival is a natural result of clever campaigns. In his fresh introduction to the bicentennial edition of Finney's *Systematic Theology*, Harry Conn commends Finney's pragmatism: "Many servants of our Lord should be diligently searching for a gospel that `works,' and I am happy to state they can find it in this volume." As Whitney R. Cross has carefully documented in *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800- 1850* (Cornell University Press, 1950), the stretch of territory in which Finney's revivals were most frequent was also the cradle of the perfectionist cults that plagued that century. A gospel that "works" for zealous perfectionists one moment merely creates tomorrow's disillusioned and spent super-saints.

Needless to say, Finney's message is radically different from the evangelical faith, as is the basic orientation of the movements we see around us today the bear his imprint: revivalism (or its modern label, "the church growth movement"), Pentecostal perfectionism and emotionalism, political triumphalism based on the ideal of "Christian America," and the anti-intellectual, anti-doctrinal tendencies of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. It was through the "Higher Life Movement" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Finney's perfectionism came to dominate the fledgling Dispensationalist movement through the auspices of Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary and author of *He That Is Spiritual*.

Finney, of course, is not solely responsible; he is more a product than a producer. Nevertheless, the influence he exercised and continues to exercise to this day is pervasive. Not only did the revivalist abandon the material principle of the Reformation (justification), making him a renegade against evangelical Christianity; he repudiated doctrines, such as original sin and the substitutionary atonement, that have been embraced by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike. Therefore, Finney is not merely an Arminian, but a Pelagian. He is not only an enemy of evangelical Protestantism, but also of historic Christianity of the broadest sort.

I do not point these things out with relish, as if to cheerfully denounce the heroes of American evangelicals. Nevertheless, it is always best, when one has lost something valuable, to retrace one's steps in order to determine when and where one last had it in his or her possession. That retracing is the purpose of this exercise, to face with some honesty the serious departure from biblical Christianity that occurred through American revivalism. For until we address this shift, we will perpetuate a distorted and dangerous course. Of one thing Finney was absolutely correct: The Gospel held by the Westminster divines whom he attacked directly, and indeed held by the whole company of evangelicals, is "another gospel" in distinction from the one proclaimed by Charles Finney. The question of our moment is, with which gospel will we side?

<sup>13</sup> Acts 20:24-27. ESV.

<sup>14</sup> Reymond. Op. cit., 717.

Jesus did not come to give a helping hand to the weak or crippled – He came to give eternal life to the spiritually dead. That is why the new birth cannot be the reward of faith; it is a sovereign act of God, which enables us to believe.<sup>15</sup>

The only measurable disciple is one who demonstrates a supernaturally changed life as defined biblically. Decisions are not disciples.

Unsound doctrine leads to wrong ways of doing church. An incorrect doctrine of the fall leads to the presupposition that dead men can respond before regeneration, therefore it is assumed the task is to remove every barrier to men “making a decision” to allow Christ to be their Savior (and optionally Lord). By exalting man’s “free will” church growth advocates have lost the biblical doctrine of a sovereign God. Therefore, they reason (from unsound doctrine) that they can make themselves a pleasing fragrance to those who are perishing so that “seekers” can “make a decision for Christ” prompted by the persuasion of the evangelist who skillfully removes the offense of the gospel and presents a win-win, nothing to lose, man centered gospel. There is no biblical repentance of sin, no command by a sovereign holy God to repent of sin or suffer His wrath. They present an impotent God who is portrayed as a “gentleman” who invites all men to repent (i.e. change their mind about Jesus not forsake sin). They promise life without death to sin and without a resurrection (regeneration). They believe they can present Christ as one who has made salvation available to anyone who has the good judgment to see the “take away value” in becoming a Christian by a decision they make of their own free will when and if they decide to. They suppose the control is in their hands.

The church growth movement is rooted in Arminian theology held by its founder Donald McGavran. This theology has led to a pragmatic methodology, which has resulted in the warehousing of thousands of “seekers” who are never regenerated and therefore are attempting to live the Christian life in the flesh. They are dead spiritually while being assured they are “in Christ” because they “made a decision” or “walked an isle” and are doing what their evangelical pastors are telling them to do. They are being entertained as they attend the “celebration” in the auditorium while their children are receiving moral instructions based upon “the owner’s manual” in another building. Then they go home together believing that they are in no danger of God’s wrath. The Arminian gospel they have received has blinded their minds to the truth that until one is first regenerated one cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God. “...unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>16</sup> Dead men do not see or enter unless they first are born from above by sovereign grace not by the will of man.

From D. L. Moody to Robert Schuller the aberrant theology and the “constituted means” of Charles Finney have characterized American religion.<sup>17</sup> These means were adopted by the Billy Graham Evangelistic

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<sup>15</sup> Harry L. Reeder, *From Embers To A Flame* (P & R Publishers: 2004), 62.

<sup>16</sup> Jn. 3:3-5.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Horton, “The American Religion” (White Horse Inn: 1996). We’ve seen how evangelist Charles Finney rejected classical Christian beliefs in order to make the Faith more “user-friendly.” Salvation is man’s accomplishment, Finney said, not a gift of God. “It is simply the philosophical result of the right use of means.” Finney also wrote that the only justification for a particular method was “its usefulness for converting sinners.” On the revival frontier, it was not truth, but experience, that mattered most; not the objective content of the Gospel, but the practical techniques that would guarantee results. As D. L. Moody expressed it, “It makes no difference how you get a man to God, provided you get him there.” By the turn-of-the-century, evangelist Billy Sunday was claiming that he was the most efficient evangelist

Association and the church growth movement which has led to the replacement of biblical worship with platform evangelism in many evangelical churches. Even though Charles G. Finney blatantly proclaimed a heretical Pelagian gospel Billy Graham heralded Finney as a great revivalist.

Dr Billy Graham summarizes the general opinion of Finney when he writes: ‘Through his Spirit-filled ministry, uncounted thousands came to know Christ in the nineteenth century, resulting in one of the greatest periods of revival in the history of America.’<sup>18</sup>

Convinced they are able, by the use of “constituted means,” to make the gospel a sweet smelling aroma to those who are perishing, they have substituted the “gospel of the grace of God” for a “gospel of the will of man.” God’s ways have been replaced by man’s ways of doing church justified by a Pelagian gospel that exalts man and by “constituted means” justified by a doctrine of pragmatism.<sup>19</sup> Modern Evangelicalism has embraced the heresy of Charles G. Finney and married it to the pragmatism of William James.

Modern Evangelicalism almost uniformly and universally teaches that in order for a person to be born again, he must first exercise faith. You have to choose to be born again. Isn’t that what you hear? In a George Barna poll, more than seventy percent of “professing evangelical Christians” in America expressed the belief that man is basically good. And more than eighty percent articulated the view that God helps those who help themselves. These positions — or let me say it negatively — neither of these positions is semi-Pelagian. They’re both Pelagian. To say that we’re basically good is the Pelagian view. ... For to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle than to rely on oneself for works, and the one is as un-Christian and anti-Christian as the other. In the light of what Luther says to Erasmus there is no doubt that he would have endorsed this judgment. And yet this view is the overwhelming majority report today in professing evangelical circles.<sup>20</sup>

## Church Growth Strategies

Presuppositions about how to conduct corporate worship, make disciples and structure the ministries of the church shape the way the church functions. It is good therefore to check one’s presuppositions against the truth of Scripture. What if God has revealed in Scripture ways for the proper functioning of the Body of Christ? Moreover, what if there are consequences for not doing church God’s way? The presuppositions of the church

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around, guaranteeing results at \$2 per soul. There’s no business like soul business in America. From Charles Finney to Robert Schuller, the American Religion is a false religion and represents departures from the Faith that, in some ways, make Rome look almost attractive. May God grant us the grace to discern and the courage to stand against this tide.

<sup>18</sup> <sup>18</sup> Iain Murray, “Charles G. Finney: How Theology Affects Understanding of Revival,” Chapter Two in *Pentecost Today? The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. “Finney’s great argument was that if men have to experience a change of nature before they can become Christians, and such a change as only God can effect, then no sinner can be responsible for his unbelief and lack of repentance. The Bible, he asserted, teaches plainly our duty to come to Christ. How can God command us to do what we cannot do? So from the fact of human responsibility as he understood it he deduced that men must possess the ability to obey. The deduction sounds rational and logical, but it is not Scriptural.”

<sup>20</sup> R. C. Sproul, “The Pelagian Captivity of The Church” (Modern Reformation Magazine (May / June issue, Vol 10:3, (2001).

growth movement have heavily influenced the way many churches function today. These presuppositions must be examined in the light of what Scripture reveals about God's ways for doing church. This author has attempted to do this and has found many CGM presuppositions and strategies that have shaped his view of the church to be misrepresenting Scripture leading him to repentance and forsaking of this view of the church.

### **Only a Positive Message**

One basic presupposition of the CGM is that all persons can be persuaded to become disciples of Christ by the use of "righteous" means of persuasion. Thus, conversions will occur by the exertion of the will of man (i.e. both preacher and seeker). The use of "constituted means" is the way God works to persuade men to receive Christ as their savior. Rooted in a Pelagian view of man the presupposition is that God will not command what man cannot do by the exercise of his free will. Thus, the use of marketing skills to persuade men to make their decision to accept Christ is God's way of reconciling all men to Himself. "Among God's own ways of persuading is this: that He persuades through our efforts."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the means of persuasion are left to man. If this is true then it makes sense that only "good news" or a positive message must be proclaimed today.

The CGM teaches that people need to hear a message that builds their self-esteem and focuses on God's unconditional love. Christ's death on the cross is presented as an example of God's love not the result of man's sin. Never call people sinners.<sup>22</sup> Never talk about God's wrath, judgment or damnation in hell. Present principles from Scripture that have a "take away value" for the "seeker" that will reduce stress, improve relationships and give meaning to life.<sup>23</sup> Things can go better with Christ even if He is not your Lord. Compare this with the apostle Paul, "...I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, compare the above "seeker friendly" message with the message of Jesus that resulted in many no longer following him:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would

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<sup>21</sup> McGavran, op. cit., p-43.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 27-29.

<sup>23</sup> Warren, op.cit., 27-59.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 20:27. ESV.

betray him.). And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.<sup>25</sup>

These words of Jesus can hardly be classified as “user friendly.” Many who had followed him after they heard this message, no longer walked with him. This is why Jesus said that no one comes to Him unless the Father draws him.<sup>26</sup> Flesh and blood did not reveal to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Father did.<sup>27</sup> Unless God opens one’s eyes to see the truth of the gospel, that there is no other name under heaven by which one must be saved, no amount of persuasion will result in regeneration. We are messengers only, God changes the heart and mind, gives the faith to believe the gospel when the whole counsel of God is proclaimed both positive and negative. “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.”<sup>28</sup> To use marketing to persuade men to believe the gospel is to be “...like so many, peddlers of God's word”<sup>29</sup>

Are “constituted means” that are used to persuade neutral? Does Scripture support this presupposition? Is one made a child of God by the will of man? Did Christ die to make salvation available to all who are persuaded by the skillful use of marketing and the will of man? Or to the contrary does the Scripture teach that man in his fallen state is “dead in trespasses and sin” unable to respond until raised from the dead spiritually by the will of God through “the power of the gospel for salvation.”<sup>30</sup> As Scripture states, “...he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”<sup>31</sup>

### Seeker Services

Removing anything that would make the “seeker” feel uncomfortable in the church service is taught as removing hindrances to growth. For instance, removing hindrances is accomplished by replacing hymns with imitations of the style and forms of music the world listens to on the radio thus making the “seeker” feel at home. The underlying idea is that expressed by Rt. Rev. Timothy Ellis, bishop of the Church of England, "We need to try new expressions. If we don't try to update and refresh our thinking we will die."<sup>32</sup> In addition to

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<sup>25</sup> John 6:53-66. ESV.

<sup>26</sup> John 6:44. ESV.

<sup>27</sup> Matt. 16:17. ESV.

<sup>28</sup> II Cor. 2:15-16. ESV.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 2:17.ESV.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 1:16; Eph. 2:4-9. ESV.

<sup>31</sup> John 1:12-13; 3:3-6; 6:44. ESV.

<sup>32</sup> “Hymns replaced by Bono lyrics at church,” by Jonathan Petre, Religion Correspondent, GMT 30/01/2007. "We need to try new expressions. If we don't try to update and refresh our thinking we will die." The Church of England is now recognizing the pulling power of rock stars by recruiting Bono, the singer and lyricist of U2, in its bid to boost congregations. A Church of England bishop is to preside at this country's first "U2-charist", an adapted Holy Communion service that uses the Irish supergroup's best-selling songs in place of hymns.

secular music in the worship service, in the U.S. removing all Christian symbols such as crosses, stained glass windows and churchy sounding names like chancel, alter, vestibule and sanctuary replacing them with platform, lobby and auditorium is believed to make “seekers” more comfortable and not feel like outsiders.

Removing hindrances for the “seeker” leads to one small step for man from the world into the church, and one gigantic step for the church in the direction of a man centered worldly worship service. The CGM advocates the use of marketing methods to identify a target group of consumers. The preferences of unchurched “Harry and Mary” defined by a demographic profile of the community surrounding the church encourages adapting the service to the preferences of those fitting this profile. Churches grew as a result and pragmatic methods rapidly gained acceptance.

The presupposition of the CGM is that methods are neutral or abiblical and can be changed without changing the message or resulting in adverse affects to the Body. Thus, it is taught that the way corporate worship services are conducted does not affect the meaning of worship or the message of the gospel. It is presupposed that God has not revealed how He desires the church to worship Him. It is even said by some that “that there is no correct style of worship. . . .the truth is there isn’t a biblical style of worship.”<sup>33</sup> “Don’t try to tell me the Bible requires holiness and a style for worship and ministry that is different from that of the world.”<sup>34</sup>

This idea that means are neutral and up for grabs was combined with the idea that evangelism is the task of highest priority for the church in this age. Therefore, everything the church does should be measured by the priority of evangelism if it is to be in God’s will. Even the worship service should not be viewed as primarily a gathering of the Body with God as the focus, but should be seen as an opportunity for evangelism by removing all “hindrances” to a “seeker” being attracted to the service. It is said that the saints have all eternity to worship God and sing His praises, but this is the day of salvation and the time is short. The CGM strategy is to offer a service that “seekers” can identify with as a way to draw them in and then switch to the gospel and their need for Christ. This bait and switch marketing strategy instead has led to the dumbing down of the gospel and a church filled with demanding consumers. To meet their demands an ever-growing smorgasbord of programs, larger and larger facilities and accelerating budgets are required to keep pace with staff salaries and mortgage payments.

Church growth advocates teach that most churches can grow if they are willing to pay the price.<sup>35</sup> It became apparent to this observer that the loss of God centered biblical worship was too high a price for church growth. When platform evangelism replaces corporate worship for the Body of Christ what will take its place? This and other costs required by the CGM as the price of growth will be examined in this treatise.

### **Bringing The World Into The Church**

Remaking the church shaped by the world is another GCM strategy based upon the presupposition that the “seeker” is more receptive to attending church if he or she can have their felt needs satisfied. The unchurched are asked what they would like to see in a church, and then the church uses their responses to remake it’s image

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<sup>33</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 240-241.

<sup>34</sup> Quoting Rick Warren by Dennis Costella, *The Church Growth Movement An Analysis of Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven" Church Growth Strategy*, *Foundation Magazine*, March-April 1998.

<sup>35</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church To Growth* (Regal Books: 1984), 44.

in the community. In addition to the remaking of the worship service into “seeker service” the ministries of the church are offered as a smorgasbord of programs to meet every felt need identified by a marketing survey of the unchurched living within the drawing area of the church. The church becomes consumer driven and shaped by the world.

The Body of Christ, the Church, is called out of the world to be holy and live godly lives separated from all forms of worldliness and ungodliness. We are to be in the world but not of the world. God does not use worldly standards to build His Kingdom..

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.<sup>36</sup>

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.<sup>37</sup>

This reveals that God’s strategy for building the kingdom of Christ is to use what is foolish and weak in the world’s eyes to shame the “wise” and “strong” of this world. Rather than present the church as like the world a Kingdom culture will present a contrast to the world. Thus, God alone receives the glory when a sinner repents.

The above three strategies taught by the CGM are developed in more depth in the next three chapters. Chapter five will explore how Jesus evaluated His church by their fruit. If the church is rooted in sound doctrine that informs it’s methods, then it will produce good fruit.<sup>38</sup> The final chapter will present a portrait of a healthy church that is doing church God’s way and bearing “good fruit.”

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<sup>36</sup> I Cor. 1:26-30. ESV.

<sup>37</sup> Phi. 2:13-16. ESV.

<sup>38</sup> Matt. 7:17. ESV.

## Chapter

# 2

## Only A Positive Message

### Gospel - Lite

In an attempt to make the gospel user-friendly the church growth movement has minimized the gospel. One popular proponent of the “seeker targeted” ministry strategy presents a minimized gospel. The “seeker” is encouraged to pray, “Jesus I believe in you and I receive you,” then is told that he or she is a member of the family of God. Sin is defined as rebellion against God’s purpose for one’s life. There is no awareness of the sinner’s offense against a holy God or the sinner’s transgression against His Law; nor is there an awareness of God’s wrath and hatred of sin. There is no confession of personal sin or understanding of repentance as a turning from sin. There is no biblical doctrine of the cross; no doctrine of the resurrection and no biblical teaching of the judgment and consequences of sin. One is told he or she is saved from a purposeless life - not from slavery to sin and God’s wrath. Instead the “seeker” is told, living without purpose “causes stress, fatigue and conflict.” The answer is the “gospel” of knowing one’s purpose which will “give your life focus,” “give meaning to your life,” “simplify your life,” “increase motivation in your life,” and “prepare you for eternity.” Moreover, biblical doctrines about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, grace, regeneration, repentance from sin and faith are not important to one’s salvation. We are told that God ultimately does not care about doctrine “the only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust Him?”<sup>39</sup> This “purpose-driven” gospel, devoid of essential biblical doctrines, could be readily accepted by any

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Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, op. cit., 27-59.

cult. Truth matters. The apostle Paul said, "...I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God."<sup>40</sup>

### **Correct Doctrine Matters**

This author knows a man who most of his Christian life lived under the mistaken understanding that, as a result of the fall, mankind is not totally depraved - dead in trespasses and sin. Furthermore, this one believed that Christ died to make salvation available to all instead of efficacious only to those God gave to the Son before the world was created. Moreover, he believed that one could resist God's sovereign grace by the exercise of "free will." And, he believed that with a little help from God one could exercise this free will and choose to let Jesus be his Savior, i.e. by an act of one's will one fulfills the condition for salvation obligating God to save. Thus, because God has promised to save him if, by an act of his will, he has received Christ (i.e. met the conditions of salvation) God is obligated to save or God is a liar.<sup>41</sup> As a result he has reason to boast. He had the good judgment to receive Christ as his Savior unlike his neighbor who lacked this good judgment. Thus, he is rewarded with heaven and his neighbor with what he deserves – hell. He is saved not by sovereign grace alone, but by his act of good judgment plus grace.

His mistaken theology exalted him and, correspondingly, diminished God's glory. It exalted him because he believed that he had chosen to let Christ come into his life and that he was letting Him work through him to serve God. This one believed that he was in control and that his will determined his relationship with God. God's grace was not sovereign, but was resistible by his free will, and he believed that if this were not true, then he would be reduced to nothing but a robot controlled by a capricious God. He was blind to the biblical truth that although he had free will to choose whatever he desired, his desires were corrupted by his sinful nature. Therefore, he had the liberty to choose only that which seemed good to him, but fell short of the good that is efficacious to salvation, for by nature he was dead in trespasses and sin.<sup>42</sup>

This man's worship of God was affected by this mistaken view. He had come to believe that everything he did was worship as long as he was working to win one more soul for Jesus. Doing mighty works for God was true worship. His focus, even in the presence of God in corporate worship, was not on God's holiness, sovereignty, and grace, but rather, on how the service was impacting a "seeker" who might be turned off by too much emphasis on holiness, repentance of sin, and total surrender to Jesus as Lord. He was concerned that, if the music did not meet the expectations of a "seeker," he or she might not come back. He was constantly evaluating the worship service through the eyes of a non-regenerated person. Thus, he saw too much churchy talk, décor, and liturgy as putting a hindrance in the way of someone coming to Jesus, to making a decision to let Jesus come into his or her heart. He was uncomfortable with too much preaching about judgment, God's wrath, man's depraved heart, and the command to live a holy life in this world. The message should be only positive.

With good intentions, this man had exchanged worship in spirit and truth for a form of evangelism that does not proclaim the whole counsel of God. What he did not realize was that he had lost his "first love" for God's

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<sup>40</sup> Acts 20:27. ESV.

<sup>41</sup> Sperry Chaffer, *Major Bible Themes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 217-221. "This is an act of the will, ... No true assurance of salvation can be experienced unless there is a definite act of receiving Christ by faith as Savior. ... It is helpful in this regard to understand that receiving Christ is an act of the will ... the fundamental question is, "Have I really received Jesus Christ by faith as my personal Savior?" One who has made this commitment can rely upon the faithfulness of God, who cannot lie to keep His promises and to save the believer by divine power and grace."

<sup>42</sup> Eph. 2:1 & 5. ESV.

Kingdom and His righteousness. He had become ashamed of the full truth of the gospel of God's grace. He thought it must be minimized to be acceptable. He believed it would turn people away to proclaim a holy sovereign God who commands all men to repent of their sins and who has set a day in which He will judge sin and pour out His wrath on all unrighteousness. He wanted his unsaved friends to hear a gospel that had the offense removed and that presented a win/ win proposition that no one could refuse. He believed it was up to him to remove all hindrances for the "seekers" so that they would see the gospel as attractive and decide to give Jesus a try by giving Him permission to come into their lives. God's grace, he believed, made "the abundant life" available to anyone who would decide by faith to accept it. It was not, as Scripture teaches, God's sovereign grace regenerating a spiritually dead soul so that faith was possible as a gift.<sup>43</sup> The gospel of God's grace alone was neither the message nor the expectation when the invitation was given. Instead, this man believed the "seeker" must be helped to make the decision to receive Christ by his or her own free will, and then God will act and regenerate his or her heart.

This man learned this theology at the feet of those who were mentored by Donald McGavran the father of the church growth movement. The self-reliance and pragmatism inherent in the strategies and principles taught by the church growth movement are rooted in a semi-Pelagian understanding of man. This movement thus misrepresents the God of sovereign grace revealed in Scripture and minimizes the fallen state of man. It exalts man and dethrones Jesus Christ as the sovereign Lord and head of the church.

Happily this man has repented and now believes that Scripture clearly teaches that no man seeks God unless God draw him. God is the only true seeker and "...the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is *seeking* such to worship Him" (Italics mine)<sup>44</sup>

## The Gospel of God's Grace

After his resurrection, Jesus instructed his disciples, "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."<sup>45</sup> Their spiritual eyes were opened and their hearts burned, as they understood "the gospel of God's grace."<sup>46</sup> The gospel of God's grace includes mankind's true condition before a Holy God. It proclaims that all are dead spiritually in trespasses and sin and that God commands all to repent of sin (a command not an invitation).<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the gospel teaches that God has set a day when He will judge all men by Him who He raised from the dead, that salvation is only in the name of Jesus Christ God's Son, who was born of a virgin, who lived a perfect life, who died to make propitiation for sin, who was raised from the dead, and who sits on God's throne now to rule all heaven and

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<sup>43</sup> Eph. 2:8. ESV.

<sup>44</sup> John 4:23.ESV.

<sup>45</sup> Luke 24:27. ESV.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 20:24. ESV.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 17:30. ESV.

earth and to judge the living and the dead. Jesus is Lord. By sovereign grace His disciples obey all that He has commanded.<sup>48</sup>

In recent history, leading evangelicals have written a statement of the gospel in an attempt to unite evangelical Christianity: The following is an excerpt:

The heart of the Gospel is that our holy, loving Creator, confronted with human hostility and rebellion, has chosen in his own freedom and faithfulness to become our holy, loving Redeemer and Restorer. The Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14): it is through his one and only Son that God's one and only plan of salvation is implemented. So Peter announced: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Christ himself taught: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Through the Gospel we learn that we human beings, who were made for fellowship with God, are by nature—that is, "in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22)—dead in sin, unresponsive to and separated from our Maker. We are constantly twisting his truth, breaking his law, belittling his goals and standards, and offending his holiness by our unholiness, so that we truly are "without hope and without God in the world" (Rom. 1:18–32, 3:9–20; Eph. 2:1–3, 12). Yet God in grace took the initiative to reconcile us to himself through the sinless life and vicarious death of his beloved Son (Eph. 2:4–10; Rom. 3:21–24).

The Father sent the Son to free us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and to make us God's children and friends. Jesus paid our penalty in our place on his cross, satisfying the retributive demands of divine justice by shedding his blood in sacrifice and so making possible justification for all who trust in him (Rom. 3:25–26). The Bible describes this mighty substitutionary transaction as the achieving of ransom, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, and conquest of evil powers (Matt. 20:28; 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Rom. 3:23–25; John 12:31; Col. 2:15). It secures for us a restored relationship with God that brings pardon and peace, acceptance and access, and adoption into God's family (Col. 1:20, 2:13–14; Rom. 5:1–2; Gal. 4:4–7; 1 Pet. 3:18).<sup>49</sup>

Those who hear and believe this gospel are those whose hearts have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have been raised from the dead spiritually, whose eyes have been opened by God's sovereign grace to see that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God. Moreover, their eyes have been opened to see their depraved condition before a holy God and to repent of their sin. They are those whom God foreknew, predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, called, justified, and glorified.<sup>50</sup> They are born anew, not by the will of man, but by God's sovereign grace in election. This is the ministry we have received from the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify of the "gospel of the grace of God," declaring the whole counsel of God. The gospel is perverted when it is minimized, truncated, or presented in a formula prayer that promises salvation by mental assent alone, or by walking an aisle, or by making a public profession.

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<sup>48</sup> Matt. 28:20. ESV.

<sup>49</sup> "THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST: AN EVANGELICAL CELEBRATION" is copyright 1999 by the committee on evangelical unity in the gospel, P.O. box 5551, Glendale Heights, IL. The drafting committee was: John N. Akers, John Ankerberg, John Armstrong, D.A. Carson, Keith Davy, Maxie Dunnam, Timothy George, Scott Hafemann, Erwin Lutzer, Harold Myra, David Neff, Thomas Oden, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, John Woodbridge.

<sup>50</sup> Rom. 8:30. ESV.

*The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration addresses this presentation of the gospel:*

We affirm that saving faith includes mental assent to the content of the Gospel, acknowledgment of our own sin and need, and personal trust and reliance upon Christ and his work.

We deny that saving faith includes only mental acceptance of the Gospel, and that justification is secured by a mere outward profession of faith. We further deny that any element of saving faith is a meritorious work or earns salvation for us.<sup>51</sup>

The gospel of God's grace has never been good news to everyone for the Apostle says,

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.<sup>52</sup>

We are charged to proclaim the full counsel of God in the sight of God. We are not to “peddle” Christ as a product that is “sold” by using the marketing strategies of the world. We are messengers only; God gives the increase. To some, we are an aroma of death, but to those God is reconciling to Himself, we are an aroma of life. God determines which of these we are to those we faithfully proclaim fully the gospel of God's grace. If we try to persuade men by taking away the offense of the gospel, we become so many peddlers of God's Word.

## The Son Has Made Him Known

The God who has revealed himself in Scripture is unrecognizable in much that passes for Christian teaching and preaching among adherents of the church growth movement. Jesus told His disciples,

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him. ... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Article #16.

<sup>52</sup> II Cor. 2:14-17. ESV.

<sup>53</sup> Jn. 14:7 & 23. ESV.

The Apostle Paul learned the truth about the God he had been misrepresenting when confronted with the glory of God on a Damascus road. Jesus revealed Himself as Lord and Messiah whom Paul was persecuting. From that moment, Paul saw all his righteousness as rubbish.<sup>54</sup> He was overwhelmed by sovereign grace.

Scripture records others who saw God's glory and whose witness forms the basis of our faith. They saw the holiness and the glory of God and, as a result, saw their own ungodliness. Job's testimony was, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes."<sup>55</sup> And, Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."<sup>56</sup> Also, the Apostle John, when in the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus reported, "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."<sup>57</sup> John's testimony was also:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.<sup>58</sup>

We are the benefactors of these eyewitness accounts. Our faith, as was theirs, is rooted in being overwhelmed by the gospel of God's grace. Unlike them, we have not physically heard, seen, or touched the Lord of life, but Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>59</sup>

The good news of the sovereign grace of God is overwhelming only when one understands the utter helplessness of one's slavery to sin. Sin does not seem so bad to the unspiritual person. Natural man (unregenerated) is not able to understand spiritual things. Only those who have the Spirit given by God's grace are able to spiritually discern truth.<sup>60</sup> Thus, natural man is unable to see the spiritual reality of a sovereign holy God; therefore, he is unable to see himself correctly. Only after God opens one's eyes to see God's glory and holiness can one see his own ungodliness. The depth of man's depravity is hidden from him. He knows he is not perfect but perceives that no one else is either. Moreover, he does not desire to be perfect because this world is his home. He has to live here. The desire to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect can only be

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<sup>54</sup> Phil. 3:8. ESV.

<sup>55</sup> Job 42:5-6. ESV.

<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 6:5. ESV.

<sup>57</sup> Rev. 1:17. ESV.

<sup>58</sup> I Jn. 1:1-4. ESV.

<sup>59</sup> Jn. 20:29. ESV.

<sup>60</sup> I Cor. 2:6-16. ESV.

put into one's heart and mind by God's Holy Spirit. God must regenerate one's heart; one must be "born from above."<sup>61</sup>

The reason one must be "born again" is because all mankind is in a state of spiritual death as the result of Adam's sin. There is no real desire for righteousness in one who is dead in trespasses and sin.<sup>62</sup> There may be a desire to be a better person but never to be a perfect person. The law of "sin and death" in the natural man overwhelms any desire to live righteously. The first sin that resulted in the spiritual death of all people was the desire to determine good and evil for one's self.<sup>63</sup> God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of good and evil. Satan tempted our first parents to eat of the forbidden tree by telling them they would be like God, "knowing good and evil." They usurped the authority reserved to God alone, because only God is capable of determining what is good and what is evil. Man was created in God's image but not with all the prerogatives of God. God is sovereign Lord of all creation. He alone determines good and evil. What God declares evil is evil. What God declares good is good.

God's law is the standard of righteousness but serves only to reveal sin.<sup>64</sup> It also reveals God's justice in punishing those who transgress God's law. God's justice demands that all mankind suffer punishment for their sin against a holy God. God would not be unfair or unjust to pour out His holy wrath upon all men. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and are dead in trespasses and sin.<sup>65</sup> Scripture teaches that he who does not believe in the only name under heaven by which men must be saved, Jesus Christ God's Son, is condemned already.<sup>66</sup> God's wrath is due all mankind because all have rebelled against God. The heart of mankind is depraved. The ultimate expression of this depraved heart is the crucifixion of God's only Son. The reason men crucified God's Son is because "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."<sup>67</sup> This is the backdrop for understanding God's grace and rightly representing Him to a lost world. It is not a user-friendly message.

## Sovereign Grace Understood

Jesus was dining with a group of Pharisees who believed they were justified by their obedience to the law. They self-righteously condemned Jesus for letting a woman of the street touch him. She was washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. Jesus responded to them with these words,

Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to

<sup>61</sup> Jn. 3:3-6. ESV.

<sup>62</sup> Col. 2:13. ESV.

<sup>63</sup> Gen. 3:5.ESV.

<sup>64</sup> Rom. 7:7. ESV.

<sup>65</sup> Rom. 3:9-10 & Col. 2:13. ESV.

<sup>66</sup> Acts 4:12& Jn. 3:18. ESV.

<sup>67</sup> Jn. 3:19. ESV.

kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.<sup>68</sup>

One must consider which person understood God's sovereign grace, the woman who knew her sin was great but had been given mercy and forgiveness or the Pharisee who believed God but trusted in his own righteousness. Which one will love God more? Which one will worship God in spirit and truth from a heart filled with gratitude? Which one will be overwhelmed by grace?

When one truly understands that by grace alone God has chosen to save him and understands that there is no good thing in him that contributed to his salvation or to God's choice of him, only then is one truly overwhelmed by grace. The love and gratitude one feels for God in Christ changes everything. One knows what he has been saved from, the power and depravity of a life enslaved to sin, and one stands in awe of God's mercy and grace. One has the motivation to live a holy life, desiring the righteousness of Christ and joyfully cooperating with God's Spirit who is "...at work in you to will and to do His good pleasure."<sup>69</sup>

One, who by God's sovereign grace has received a new heart that loves righteousness and is being transformed into the likeness of Christ, has been freed of his slavery to sin and has become a bond slave of Jesus Christ. He is not forced to keep the law of God. He is in complete agreement with God's righteousness. He loves God's commandments because he loves God. Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments."<sup>70</sup> One who walks after the Spirit fulfills the righteousness of the law by faith. There is no condemnation because the very righteousness of Christ is imputed to those God elects in Christ to be conformed to His image. Thus, desiring righteousness is due to a changed heart and mind by God's sovereign grace. Actually, being righteous is accomplished by sovereign grace as God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. In this life, we are at the same time sinners and reckoned as righteous by sovereign grace. We await the complete removal of sin in our glorified state in the new heavens and earth prepared for our new sinless resurrected bodies that will dwell in His presence and be like Him.<sup>71</sup>

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.<sup>72</sup>

When living by faith, a person believes that God exists and is able to do all He has promised. Abraham had the gospel preached to him and he believed God was able to do what He had promised and it was accounted to

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<sup>68</sup> Lk. 7:44-47. ESV.

<sup>69</sup> Phil. 2:13. ESV.

<sup>70</sup> Jn. 14:15-21. ESV.

<sup>71</sup> I Jn. 3:1-3. ESV.

<sup>72</sup> Rom. 8:29-30. ESV.

him as righteousness.<sup>73</sup> Faith in Jesus Christ believes that He is the Son of God and will do all He has promised. It is seeing beyond this world to that which Christ is preparing for those God has called, justified and glorified.

The church misrepresents God's grace, when it presents a minimized gospel message regarding the seriousness of man's depraved condition and the price paid by Jesus to redeem His people.

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<sup>73</sup> Gal. 3:6-8. ESV.



Chapter  
**3**

## Seeker Services

**P**ragmatism is what works. It has a legitimate role as a criterion for many endeavors. The end justifies the means because the means accomplish a desired end result. Those means that do not serve to accomplish the desired result are rightly discarded. Many attempts to develop the first airplane failed. The design that worked was chosen and perfected. Those that did not work were forgotten.

When the desired end result is church growth, measured by attendance at a gathering of the church, pragmatism can result in growth. The means, it is believed, are justified by results. “Constituted means” for growth can be learned and replicated resulting in churches of even mega-size. This is a fact not disputed by most observers of the church today. Moreover, church growth consultants can help a congregation increase its attendance. However, is this the role of those church helpers modeled in the New Testament? Those who were sent by the apostle Paul were instructed to “...put what remained into order.”<sup>74</sup> The focus was on the congregation “working properly” according to God’s revealed ways. The Lord added to their numbers.<sup>75</sup>

Jesus is the head of the Body, which is His church. He commanded His church to, “...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”<sup>76</sup> God adds to the church those who are being saved for He is a seeker of those who worship Him in spirit and truth. Establishing churches among all peoples by baptizing

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<sup>74</sup> Titus 1:5. ESV.

<sup>75</sup> Acts 2:47.

<sup>76</sup> Mat 28:19-20. ESV.

those who respond to the gospel and teaching them to obey Jesus Christ as Lord is the biblical means for making disciples. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two teaching and proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom. Upon their testimony that Jesus is the Christ He established His church. Evangelism took place in the world and worship was for the saints as they gathered and "...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."<sup>77</sup> Unbelievers were afraid to join them.<sup>78</sup> But if one did he was drawn by God and "he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you."<sup>79</sup>

No user-friendly "seeker targeted" worship service was used or envisioned by the early church. Yet it was said of them that they turned the world upside down and thousands were added to the church within the first few years after Pentecost (and most were Jewish converts). It was years later that the apostle Paul took the gospel to the Gentiles using the same methods taught by Jesus. Paul's preaching was never user friendly designed to minimize the offense of the gospel. He proclaimed the whole counsel of God believing the gospel was the power of God to change lives. Paul would never have minimized the gospel and replaced Christian worship for a "seeker" service. Nor would he have taught marketing principles to church leaders as a method to grow the church. Paul once said that he counted all his human accomplishments as rubbish and decided to know nothing among them except Christ and Him crucified. He was convinced that God used the preaching of Christ to produce a Godly sorrow that led to repentance of sin and belief in the gospel after regeneration by the same power of God's Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. He knew all men were spiritually dead in trespasses and sin condemned already and without hope until "born from above" by God's Spirit and choice. No one could see or enter the Kingdom unless first "born from above."<sup>80</sup>

When one presents himself as a church helper to "put what remained into order" using biblical means he is functioning in a needed biblical role. But when he assumes the role of a marketing expert promising to help the church to grow by "constituted means" not authorized or modeled by Scripture he is abusing the church and teaching them that the gospel and Scripture are not sufficient means to expand the Kingdom of Christ. Moreover, he is usurping the authority of Jesus Christ the Lord of the church who has given His church everything needed to achieve its purpose. At best he is increasing the number of "goats" at the expense of the "sheep."

## Marketing The Church

A trend that has captured much of the church in the last half of the twentieth century is a consumer driven strategy taken too far. The church growth movement has been the major impetus for this trend. It began as a

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<sup>77</sup> Acts 2:42. ESV.

<sup>78</sup> Acts 5:13. ESV.

<sup>79</sup> I Cor. 14:23-24. ESV.

<sup>80</sup> Jn. 3:3-5. ESV.

move toward structuring the church's ministry to meet the "felt needs" of the unchurched. "Marketing is the process by which you seek to apply your product to the desires of the target population."<sup>81</sup>

For instance, in structuring a worship service it seemed reasonable to remove unnecessary hindrances to communicating with the "seeker." It was believed to be difficult for a seeker to relate to esoteric Christian symbolism, theological language and to hymns with lyrics like "Bread of heaven, on Thee we feed, for Thy flesh is meat indeed." Thus, in an attempt to "become all things to all men" a trend developed to remove these "hindrances" and to change the form of a service to allow uninitiated "seekers" to identify more easily and thus feel more comfortable in a "worship" service.

Some churches have recognized the problem of de-Christianizing the worship service for Christians. Therefore, at the traditional time on Sunday morning they offer a service for "seekers", but they do not call it a worship service. Then, on another day of the week (not the Lord's day) a Christian worship service is provided.<sup>82</sup> However, most churches that have accepted the "seeker" method of ministry have not provided two distinctive services. The term used to describe this is "seeker sensitive." Thus, seeking to be relevant to the unchurched a subtle shift (or not so subtle shift) away from biblical worship has taken place in many evangelical congregations. That is, corporate worship intended for God's saints to come humbly before God with grateful adoration, praise, confession, repentance, and instruction from God's Word has been replaced.

This subtle shift was the beginning of a consumer driven strategy that has led to the de-Christianizing of what can now only loosely be called a worship service in some churches.

The fact of the matter is, much evangelical "worship" is simply not true worship at all. For decades now evangelical churches have been conducting their services for the sake of unbelievers. Both the revivalistic service of a previous generation and the "seeker service" of today are shaped by the same concern – appeal to the unchurched. Not surprisingly, in neither case does much that might be called worship by Christians occur. As a result, many evangelicals who have been sitting for years in such worship services are finding their souls drying up, and they have begun to long for something else.<sup>83</sup>

By its very nature the church is a worshipping community and if Christian worship is lost what will take its place? The Body of Christ gathering in communion with God and each other "...continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42). These activities are at the heart of Christian worship. God is the focus, His worth is praised, His life is celebrated and participated in by the Word, the breaking of bread and prayers. Faith is strengthened in a sovereign God who is able to do all He has promised through Jesus Christ. If an unregenerate person comes into this fellowship his or her sin will be revealed and hope will be proclaimed in the name of Christ Jesus.

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<sup>81</sup> George Barna, *Marketing the Church* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 23.

<sup>82</sup> Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois.

<sup>83</sup> Reymond, op. cit., 873.

But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, the following de-Christianizing forms presented below are proliferating among evangelical churches. What has been called “platform evangelism” is replacing Christian worship. Sunday morning worship services are being transformed into services designed to evangelize the unchurched “seeker” who wanders into an auditorium devoid of Christian symbols, décor or liturgy. Traditional forms, it is believed, would conjure up negative images of sin, judgment, and of God’s wrath and eternal damnation. This they feel would act as a repellent. The saving blood of Jesus Christ shed on a cross to reconcile sinners who exercise faith in the name of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior is saved for a more appropriate time. Instead, a positive message of practical help is offered to move a “seeker” one step closer to being a follower of Jesus Christ should he or she wish to give the Christian lifestyle a trial run. It is argued in defense of this trend that “forms” do not affect the content of the message. However, when the followings forms are exercised, the message heard by the unbeliever is being changed and the believer is being short-changed by forms of worship that starve the soul and fail to inspire biblical faith.

### **De-Christianizing Worship Trends**

*A trend away from expository preaching and teaching that presents scripture as revealing absolute truth, because this is believed to be offensive to a "post-modern" way of thinking.*

The worship service is not the appropriate time to present "provocative" teaching. Rather, what is considered appropriate are topical sermons with lots of pragmatic teaching from scripture that the unregenerate can apply and thus provide a "take away value" to the consumer. Whole services are conducted without reference to the great themes of Scripture. Positive thinking and even new age spiritism is being substituted for biblical truth. The mention of an offended holy God’s wrath, sin, hell, eternal damnation, or that men are lost without the saving work of Christ Jesus on the cross is considered too harsh for the ears of a "seeker." The gospel is presented as "God loves you" as if that is all a "seeker" needs to know. One prominent pastor who is a respected proponent of the consumer driven strategy of church growth has gone so far as to proclaim, "Christ always tried to give man's self-image a boost. When he met immoral people He never called them sinners. Never! ...He never called a person a sinner."<sup>85</sup>

*A trend away from the command in Col. 3:16 to "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

The Word of Christ and the great doctrines of the faith are barely recognized in most of what is sung in today's contemporary worship. The Apostle Paul admonished the church to "Let the word of Christ..." be expressed

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<sup>84</sup> I Cor. 14:24-25. ESV

<sup>85</sup> Schuller, op. cit., pp-27-29.

in every aspect of corporate worship. Moreover, some pastors are raising concern over the disregarding of the Apostle Paul's command. Referring to Christian song writers Pastor John MacArthur writes:

Many of the lyrics they write will be ingrained far more deeply and permanently in the minds of Christians than anything pastors teach from the pulpit. How many songwriters are skilled enough in theology and Scripture to qualify for such a vital role in the catechesis of our people?<sup>86</sup>

Likewise, Leonard Payton observed:

So extreme is the case now that anyone who knows a dozen chords on a guitar and can produce rhymes to Hallmark card specifications is considered qualified to exercise this component of the ministry regardless of theological training and examination.<sup>87</sup>

Many large churches have invested hundreds of staff and volunteer hours producing professional-like productions with no mention of the gospel. Non-Christians, brought by their family and friends, are presented with a musical play heralding the virtues of being more loving and kind to one another. Even Christmas productions are being written with no more reference to the meaning of Christmas than “giving is better than receiving.” No Jesus Christ, no biblical gospel, no reason for the season. And sadly, this missed opportunity is justified by a consumer mindset toward the lost. Satan and the sandman are working together lulling the church to sleep with lullabies devoid of strong doctrine and filled with sentimental love devoid of the meaning of agape. Pray God for a great awakening to the power inherent in the preaching of the gospel!

We are seeing a waning confidence in the message of the gospel. Even the evangelical church shows signs of losing confidence in the convincing and converting power of the gospel message. That is why increasing numbers of churches prefer sermons on family life and psychological health. ...The winning message, it seems, is the one that helps people to solve their temporal problems, improves their self-esteem and makes them feel good about themselves. In such a cultural climate, preaching on the law, sin and repentance, and the cross has all but disappeared, even in evangelical churches. The church has become “user friendly,” “consumer oriented,” and as a result evangelical churches are becoming inundated with “cheap grace” (Bonhoeffer).<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> John MacArthur, "With Hearts and Minds and Voices," *Christian Research Journal*, 1999, p-42.

<sup>87</sup> Leonard R. Payton, "Congregational Singing and the Ministry of the Word," *The Highway*, July 1998.

<sup>88</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, op. cit. 882.

*A trend toward removing all symbols of traditional Christianity from the design and décor of church facilities. The consumer mindset does not want to offend the "seeker" with strange symbols or "churchy" architecture.*

Churches are beginning to look like libraries, hospitals, and corporate office buildings. No crosses, stained windows and churchy sounding names like chancel, alter, vestibule and sanctuary replacing them with stage, lobby and auditorium is believed to make "seekers" more comfortable and not feel like outsiders.

To honor God as God, we must worship Him as He and He alone decrees. We must be done with Madison Avenue. No church dare replace the chancel with a stage. Stages are built for performance; chancels are constructed for worship. We must work, and work hard, to remove the shadows we have placed over the glory of God, that God's people may be renewed by basking in His divine splendor and refulgent glory. Nothing else will do.<sup>89</sup>

It is true that a building is not sacred and that the church is the Body of Christ. People, not an edifice are the proper focus. However, appropriate décor and the use of Christian symbols help to create an environment for the communion of the saints in the presence of God. A sincere "seeker" is searching for something bigger than himself among a people who without apology worship the one true God.

*A trend toward the worship service competing with other forms of societal entertainments thus becoming more professional and performance oriented.*

The worship service has shifted from a focus on God to a focus on man. Thus, the service resembles Christian entertainment with the criterion of "success" being the quality of the performance. Staging, lighting and multimedia presentations are evaluated by comparison with theatrical productions. The larger the church the higher the expectation of a seamless professional performance. To maintain the quality of performance paid non-Christian musicians and performers are used. This is sometimes justified as a "witness" to them. Persons without the Holy Spirit are being presented as a part of the worship team leading the congregation in giving glory to God. It seems the inconsistency of this practice is not considered.

Some have even gone to orchestrating "spontaneous" participation by the congregation. The congregation is queued when to raise their hands, hug the people around them and applaud the performance. The larger the church the more orchestrated the worship service.

To accommodate two, three and even five services timing is critical. Ushers instruct congregants as they wait to get a seat and the auditorium is cleared of those attending the previous service. They are told where to go if they have infants or handicap needs, how many minutes they have to be in their seats, not to save seats and how many minutes they will have to exit the building after the service. It feels like an attraction at Disneyland.

*A trend toward casual dress that has reached the point that any form of dress is acceptable.*

This is a subtle form of disrespect and denial of gathering in the presence of almighty God. The focus has shifted from God to the individual. There is a loss of the awe of being together in God's presence to worship

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<sup>89</sup> R.C. Sproul, *A Taste of Heaven: Worship In The Light of Eternity* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2006), 173.

Him. In an attempt to make the "seeker" feel comfortable we are in danger of misrepresenting who God is and the reason we gather for worship.

Moreover, any form of liturgy has been rejected to the point that in some evangelical worship services a casual behavior as well as dress is encouraged. Attendees wander from their seats during the service getting a cup of coffee, watching a multimedia presentation in an adjoining room and then rejoining the "corporate worship" as they feel led.

*A trend toward a "ministry of presence" devoid of the name of Jesus Christ.*

Public prayers, even in a worship service, are increasingly not offered in the name of Jesus Christ lest someone be offended by this name. Ministry is provided without mention of the source being Jesus Christ. As if the church has the authority or prerogative to minister apart from Jesus Christ. Christians have been martyred for refusing to deny the name of Jesus Christ. Yet, love is proclaimed as a value in itself apart from the name of Jesus Christ. Is it love for the church to offer less than its best, i.e. Jesus Christ? To offer bread without the "bread of life" is not love. The world will always demand that the church not "speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." The prayer of the church must always be, "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."<sup>90</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A dying world needs to know the truth. Removing unnecessary barriers to a "seeker" being able to hear the truth is not wrong. However, a genuine "seeker" does not expect the church to be so like the world that he or she can fit in without change. One who is looking for truth expects to be challenged. The gospel is never an offense to a person who is lost and looking for reality. Moreover, Scripture tells us that "no one seeks for God" therefore if someone is seeking truth God's Spirit is already working in that person's life. Thus, all the more reason to not be ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to change lives. There is no need to minimize or take away the offense of the gospel to persuade "seekers."

Moreover, thought needs to be given to what we are teaching the next generation of believers about the nature of the church. Will they understand and love the church as the Body of Christ? Will they be willing to sacrifice for the continuation of the church? Will they have a loyalty to a local congregation long enough for genuine community to develop? Will they expect the church to become what they desire regardless of the ecclesiology taught in Scripture?

The strategy of removing barriers to communicating with non-Christians is not wrong. What needs to be evaluated is how far a congregation can go in becoming a consumer driven church before it loses the power of a worship service for Christians? Moreover, how far in this direction can the church go before it misrepresents "...the way the truth and the life?" The Apostle Paul's attempt to be all things to all men so that by all means he might save some is a valid missionary strategy. De-Christianizing a worship service is not. The purpose the Apostle Paul is referring to in I Corinthians 9 is a missionary strategy, i.e. his charge to take the gospel to all whatever their culture Jew, Gentile, slave, free, so that he meets them in their situation with the whole truth of the gospel. He would be appalled at turning Christian worship into a service catering to the preferences of the world for he said:

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<sup>90</sup> Acts 4:18, & 29-30. ESV.

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup>testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ...for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. <sup>28</sup>Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son. <sup>29</sup>I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup>and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Acts 20:20-30. ESV.

## Chapter

# 4

## Bringing The World Into The Church

The moment we bring the categories of the world into the Church, the moment the Church becomes “worldly” in her social distinctions, in her way of conducting her affairs – raising funds and similar things – the moment she brings in the worldly idea, the worldly method, she is guilty of worldliness. Nothing, perhaps, has been such a brake upon the advance of Christianity, and the work of the Church, as this spirit of worldliness entering into the Church of God, and turning her into something, which is so essentially different from the primitive pattern found in the New Testament.<sup>92</sup>

**T**he world will love its own. Precisely because God “...has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,” the world hates us. Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”<sup>93</sup> We are admonished by Scripture not to love the world and told that this world is not our home. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” We are strangers and exiles on the earth that seek a better homeland, a heavenly one where righteousness dwells.<sup>94</sup> God has set a day when He will judge this world and destroy it. This world is not our home.

When the world is brought into the church a subtle process takes place not unlike the petrifying of wood. Petrified wood is the result of wood fibers being replaced with stone. Its appearance is that of wood, but its

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<sup>92</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christian Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 362-363.

<sup>93</sup> Col. 1:13 & Jn. 15:18-19. ESV.

<sup>94</sup> Heb. 11:13-16. ESV.

substance has changed from soft wood to stone. Jesus said to the church at Sardis, 'I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.'<sup>95</sup>

The Body of Christ, the Church, is called out of the world to be holy and live godly lives separated from all forms of worldliness and ungodliness. We are to be in the world but not of the world. Jesus said to go into the world not bring the world into the church. The church is not a chameleon changing itself to look like the world.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.<sup>96</sup>

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ...that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.<sup>97</sup>

This reveals that God's strategy for building the kingdom of Christ is to use what is foolish and weak in the world's eyes to shame the "wise" and "strong" of this world. Rather than present the church as like the world in its music preferences, its activities, its architecture and its lifestyle, God calls His people to be a "peculiar people" unto Himself different from the world.<sup>98</sup> This is God's intentional strategy so that no man can boast when hearts and minds are changed from darkness to light, from death to life. God alone gets the glory when a sinner repents and responds in faith to the gospel, when one is delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son. God does not desire that His church use "constituted means," church growth strategies or anything else besides the foolishness of the gospel to persuade sinners. It is defrauding people to woo them to a "worship" service that presents a fun loving God who is like them in their music preference, lifestyle and desire to make this world a better place. They leave out the fact that God hates sin and will pour out his wrath in judgment on all wickedness and all mankind who like their father Satan loves the world and the things of the world.

For the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

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<sup>95</sup> Rev. 3:1. ESV.

<sup>96</sup> I Cor. 1:26-30. ESV.

<sup>97</sup> Phi. 2:13-16. ESV.

<sup>98</sup> Deut. 14:2 NJKV.

## Where is the Warning?

Where is the warning in the message today? Where is the truth about the imminent danger, the need to flee the wrath to come revealed in Scripture? The good news is not that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life here on earth that you can achieve with a little help from Him. The truth is that there is no hope for this world. It is condemned already. The good news is that there is a new creation in Jesus Christ who is the first of many brethren. Those in Christ are raised spiritually from the dead by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead physically and placed Him above every name in heaven and earth to judge the living and the dead. He has prepared a place for those redeemed by His life, death and resurrection. The hope is in a new heavens and earth in which righteousness dwells and sin will be no more. Only those regenerated by God's Spirit at the preaching of the gospel will share in this new creation prepared for those whom he foreknew, for those "...he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."<sup>99</sup> The good news is that the elect are saved from the wrath of God that is coming on the whole world.

Just as in the days of Noah the world mocked while Noah entered the ark the door was locked and destruction came.

As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>100</sup>

The CGM in an effort to remove all hindrances to a "seeker" receiving Christ removes the offense of the gospel. One way to do this is a makeover of the church so that it resembles the world. It is then a small step from the world into the church. The church becomes "of the world" and its members resemble the world more than Christ. Polls indicate little difference between the lifestyles and beliefs of so-called "born again" Christians and the general public. Those who report having "made a personal commitment to Jesus that is still important in their lives, and believe that when they die they will go to heaven because they have confessed their sins and have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior," reveal little difference in their thinking and lifestyles from the world.<sup>101</sup>

## A Journalist Report

The following is a report from a journalist who attended a Saddleback Community Church conference designed to help pastors learn how to implement the Saddleback model for growth.

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<sup>99</sup> Rom. 8:28-29. ESV.

<sup>100</sup> Matt. 24:37-39. ESV.

<sup>101</sup> George Barna, *Marketing The Church* (Colorado Springs: 1998): 23. See also George Barna and James Mackay, *Vital Signs* (Westchester, Ill: Crossway, 1984): 140-141.

AFTER PERSONALLY covering the Saddleback Community Church "Building a Purpose-Driven Church" seminar held in Southern California this past January, it became clear to me that some of today's most influential religious leaders misunderstand and misrepresent the true purpose of the church today. Dr. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church and director of the "Building a Purpose-Driven Church" workshops, has influenced thousands of churches during the last decade that are interested in the "Church Growth Movement."

After observing and evaluating the Saddleback Seminar, we firmly believe that if the "Purpose-Driven Church" model is to be followed, then fidelity to the Lord and His Word must be sacrificed in order to gain the numbers. It is important to note, however, that Warren does not say a church must be huge in order for it to be vital or healthy; rather, he believes that a church's health can be equated to its dynamic growth.

So what are some of the changes that must take place for a local assembly to adopt the growth strategy of the Saddleback model? From our understanding of the plan which was clearly spelled out at the seminar, the following must occur in order to transform a traditionally-styled church of any size into one that can boast dramatic growth:

- A contemporary-styled "Seeker Service" aimed at drawing in the unsaved and the unchurched from the community must replace the traditional Sunday worship service. To do this successfully, the church service must be non-threatening, familiar and comfortable to the "seeker" (the unsaved visitor).
- The dress must be casual. The typical "Saddleback Sam" (a researched composite of the unchurched yuppie commonly found in Saddleback Church's surrounding community) dresses up for work all week, and he wants to "dress down" on the weekends. (As we shall see throughout this article, Saddleback Sam's likes and dislikes are what determine the style of the church service.) Attendees and church staff alike shun any ties, suits and dresses. Warren, dressed in a casual shirt, khakis and loafers told his seminar audience, "Get comfortable. This is as dressed up as I get in this church. My idea of winter is I put on socks, and obviously I don't think it's winter yet."
- The music must be contemporary. Not only must the lyrics of the music be more recent, but the style of music should be that which the unsaved hears on a daily basis. The entertainment composite of the Saddleback sound system, band, singers and presentation would rival that of any secular rock concert. Warren stated that one of the first things a church should do is "replace the organ with a band." But he went on to say that if a band was not feasible, then at least a church could purchase a keyboard that will incorporate midi disks in order to give the sound of a band. Furthermore, the purpose of the church choir should be "backing up the soloist. That's the 90's way to use a choir rather than just having them sing."
- The message must be only positive. We consider this to be the most flagrant flaw. Yes, the saved and unsaved alike can feel better about themselves after a message that often mixes psychology and an uplifting Scripture text. Such topics as dealing with guilt, self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, mood enhancement or motivation for success will encourage the worldly, weary individual. But what is God's command to the faithful undershepherd of the flock? Far, far different.
- The ministries of the church must be geared to meeting the needs and special interests of the thousands who attend. Support groups for depression, eating disorders, infertility, family and friends of homosexuals, post abortion, and separated men and women were abundant. Many ministries were intended to bring together ones with similar business or professional interests, common recreational interests and so on. We could not find one single ministry listed in Saddleback Community Church's bulletin that involved the taking the Gospel message out to the lost in the community. In fact, Warren scoffed at the idea of passing out tracts or going door-to-door since "Saddleback Sam" is offended by such old-fashion, out-moded forms of evangelism.

- Doctrinal instruction is not given to the church as a whole on the Lord's Day. Despite the fact that the early church clearly sets forth the example that doctrine is to be taught on Sunday to all the church body, at Saddleback, doctrine is only taught to sub-groups of the congregation apart from the regular church services. Warren emphasized Saddleback's strategy of moving new members "around the bases" by having interested Christians take special classes to prepare them for service. Although Bible study groups also meet together, our question is this: Why is not the pulpit used to proclaim the "whole counsel of God" to the whole congregation assembled before it on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:20-31)? Why make serious, systematic Bible instruction an option, heard only by the relatively few in the crowd who desire to "round the next base"? The whole counsel of God is to be proclaimed, to all seated before the pulpit, all the time!
- A spirit of compromise must prevail in the church that is to experience dynamic growth. The embrace of contemporary culture and style will most assuredly set the desired mood that totally opposes the Biblical mandate to earnestly contend for the faith and separate from error. What works, what is least offensive and what is positive and uplifting is what should define the ministry, according to Warren. The church leaders who are interested in dynamic growth must embrace the attitude that says, "Don't try to tell me the Bible requires holiness and a style for worship and ministry that is different from that of the world." This "grace-in-your-face" attitude is so prevalent today because of church elders who are not willing, or not aware of how, to instruct ones to behave in the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15).<sup>102</sup>

Jesus said you would recognize false teachers by their fruit.

A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"<sup>103</sup>

The "successful" churches that employ CGM strategies and principles justify what they are doing by their fruit. They say, look at all the "mighty works" we have done in your name. It is possible to build Megachurches using the mighty works of the world. The world loves its own and will flock to the best show in town. But is it "good fruit." The only "good fruit" is that which is produced by those abiding in the true vine, Jesus Christ.

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<sup>102</sup> Dennis Costella, *The Church Growth Movement An Analysis of Rick Warren's "Purpose Driven" Church Growth Strategy*, FOUNDATION Magazine, March-April 1998.

<sup>103</sup> Matt. 7:18-20. ESV.

Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Jn. 15:5-6. ESV.

## Chapter

# 5

## Good Fruit

**H**ow can a congregation know that it is producing “good fruit?” Jesus said: “You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.”<sup>105</sup> This implies that the spiritual health of a congregation can be determined by examining its fruit. Thus, a biblical definition of “good fruit” is required.

The spiritual maturity of congregants is hard to measure. However, a moral lifestyle, strong belief in biblical truth, mobilization of ministry gifts, a strong commitment to world evangelization, faithful financial stewardship and a demonstrated love for one’s brothers and sisters in Christ through serving and care are good outward indicators. God knows the heart, he alone can judge a person’s spiritual maturity, but love motivated by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ must be expressed (“faith alone that is not alone”). Every tree produces fruit according to its kind. A congregation that is producing Christlike lives is outwardly, at least, a biblical church.

## Outward Signs

We are admonished to judge those who call themselves Christians. Moreover, we are “...not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, when a “Christian” displays immoral behavior

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<sup>105</sup> Matt. 7:16-17. ESV.

<sup>106</sup> I Cor. 5:11-12. ESV.

they are to be disciplined that they may be restored or purged from the fellowship to protect the health of the Body of Christ. A congregation that does not practice church discipline by purging itself of “bad fruit” will not remain healthy. From this we learn that “good fruit” and “bad fruit” are judged by outward behavior. This does not ensure that the heart is good. Hypocrites are difficult to recognize by outward behavior alone. However, if a congregation is consistently producing “bad fruit” it is by this indicator a spiritually unhealthy church. Jesus said that healthy trees produce good fruit and diseased trees produce bad fruit. Moreover, Scripture teaches that “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”<sup>107</sup>

Another indicator of good fruit is the beliefs of members. Biblical truth faithfully taught and believed will renew the minds of members and transform them into the likeness of Christ. Their lives will reflect biblical values and decisions that shape their attitudes and worldview. By contrast, congregations whose members resemble the world in unbiblical beliefs, divorce rates, and other comparable characteristics are most likely not teaching sound biblical doctrine. Studies have revealed little difference between those who claim a commitment to Jesus and have accepted Him as their Savior and the beliefs and lifestyles of non-Christians.<sup>108</sup>

Mobilization of the ministry gifts God has distributed to the members of Christ’s Body His church is another indicator of church health. Good fruit is characterized by good works motivated by a love for others and the spiritual desires and passion of those given opportunities for ministry. They “...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”<sup>109</sup> By contrast dysfunctional congregations are dominated by the ministry gifts of a few while most members are consumers. It is not uncommon to see 80% consumers of the ministry of others. They lack a zeal for service and want only to be served. They do not resemble the Lord, “...our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”<sup>110</sup>

Commitment to world evangelization is another indicator of “good fruit.” Healthy congregations will be reaching out and preparing members to share their faith with unbelievers. They will contribute to the planting of congregations who in turn plant congregations among all peoples.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, healthy congregations will gather for biblical worship for the edifications of the Body of Christ through preaching of sound doctrine, prayer, sharing in the sacraments and fellowship with other believers. They will scatter for evangelism and gather for worship and training.

Financial stewardship is another indicator of a healthy congregation that faithfully teaches biblical giving. They will teach their members that they have a greater need to give, in order to grow spiritually, than the church has for their money. Biblical teaching and financial planning on an ongoing basis helps members have the

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<sup>107</sup> Gal. 5:22-24. ESV.

<sup>108</sup> George Barna and James Mackay, *Vital Signs*, op.cit., 140-141.

<sup>109</sup> Col. 1:10. ESV.

<sup>110</sup> Ti. 2:13-14. ESV.

<sup>111</sup> Matt. 28:18-20. ESV.

discretionary monies to give according to the biblical standard of tithing. Some may have the mistaken belief that tithing is an Old Testament teaching. However, Abraham gave 10% to Melchizedek.<sup>112</sup> Christ was declared a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.<sup>113</sup> The New Testament says we are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.<sup>114</sup> So if Abraham gave ten percent, before the Mosaic Law, then can we justify doing less than giving 10% to Jesus Christ a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek?

However, Abraham serves as a strong example of a man of faith. Thus, 2% given according to one's faith is better than 10% or more given legalistically. Learning to give by faith is an essential part of becoming a spiritually mature follower of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said the "widow's mite" was more than that given by others. Those who give 10% of a low income may be giving all of their discretionary funds. Their sacrifice is much more than 10% of a high income. The issue is sacrifice. A willingness to sacrifice this world's goods to further the work of Christ is the attitude that is pleasing to God. Being rich in Christ is true riches. However, those with high incomes may not have any discretionary funds because of the need for financial planning and adjustment of lifestyle, so that they can give according to their convictions. Healthy congregations help members to adjust their lifestyles so that they have the discretionary monies to give generously by faith.

Finally, members who love one another characterize a healthy congregation. Their love is rooted in Christ's love that in turn is manifesting the love of the Father. They are "...those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."<sup>115</sup>

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."<sup>116</sup>

Love is linked to Christ's commandments. Love is linked with abiding in Christ. Love issues from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith.<sup>117</sup> The mark of a congregation that is producing "good fruit" is love. When a congregation has "...abandoned its first love" for Christ, each other and the lost it is suffering from a terminal disease. It may have a reputation for being alive, but according to Christ it is dead.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Gen. 14:19-20.

<sup>113</sup> Heb. 5:6-10.

<sup>114</sup> Gal. 3:29.

<sup>115</sup> Rev. 12:17.ESV.

<sup>116</sup> Jn. 15:8-14. ESV.

<sup>117</sup> I Tim. 1:5. ESV.

<sup>118</sup> Rev. 2- 3. ESV.

Good fruit is supernaturally produced. It is dependent on God's grace through His Spirit who is at work in those who love Him working out their salvation by empowering them "...to will and to work for his good pleasure."<sup>119</sup>

## A Christ Pleasing Church

The health of the Church as the Body of Christ in the world is dependent on each part's "proper working" in right relationship to the other parts.<sup>120</sup> If Christ Jesus is not functioning as the head of the Body then the Body is dysfunctional. A human body when its parts are not in right relationship with its head results in spastic behavior, abnormal muscle contractions, paralysis, outbursts of emotional excitement, fits, palsy and death. Too often, this is what we see in the church today.

So many pastors and church leaders today are striving for church growth, but that is putting the cart before the horse. The objective should not be church growth, but church health, because growth must proceed from health.<sup>121</sup>

What would a healthy Body of Christ look like if each member were in right relationship with its head – Christ Jesus? The following is a composite of what it would look like based upon Jesus' teachings and His evaluation of the churches in Revelation.<sup>122</sup> Jesus walked among the seven churches of Asia Minor clearly delineating what was pleasing to Him. The following is an attempt to glean characteristics that Jesus considers "good fruit" from His evaluation of the church in Revelation 2-3 and other relevant Scriptures. To please Jesus His church will:

**Defend Truth:** The members and church leaders do not tolerate false teachings. The most Christlike members govern. Biblical qualifications for leadership are taken seriously and applied consistently. Orthodox Christian doctrines are taught and believed.

**Demonstrated Love/ Unity:** Members express a Christlike sacrificial love for God, each other, and the lost. There is a demonstrated oneness and love among members of the Body. This oneness and love is visible to the world, "...that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."<sup>123</sup>

**Christlikeness Example:** Leaders and members do not tolerate immorality in the Body of Christ. There is a clear distinction between the life-style and values of Christians and those of the world. The world will take notice that church members had been with Jesus, and call them Christ-like-ones again. Moreover, Christians will be what the Apostle said, "...you are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living

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<sup>119</sup> Phil. 2:13. ESV.

<sup>120</sup> Eph. 4:16-17 NAS

<sup>121</sup> Reeder, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>122</sup> Rev. 2-3 NAS

<sup>123</sup> Jn. 17:23. ESV.

God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts.” Their lives lend credibility to the gospel of the kingdom.

**Sacrificial:** There is a willingness to suffer the loss of everything to gain Christ; this world is not their home. Members sacrifice for the cause of Christ investing His resources to gain the greatest increase before He returns. The increase is measured by what Christ commanded as the task of highest priority, making disciples of all peoples for the purpose of worshipping God. The structures of the church facilitate “proper working” of each part in terms of building up the whole to accomplish this task. Moreover, this task affects every decision; in contrast to the way today’s church invests the Lord’s money. Presently 95% of the Church’s financial resources in the United States are being spent on ministry to Christians in the form of buildings, programs, and staff. Of the other 5% being spent on ministry to the world, only one-half of one percent is invested in taking the gospel to “unreached people groups.” (source: U.S. Center for World Missions 1995). In addition, effective stewardship is measured by lives given as “living sacrifices” not just in financial terms.

**Faithful Witness to Christ Jesus:** Members hold fast the name of Christ and do not deny His name. They are not ashamed of the gospel of Christ Jesus as Scripture declares. Those under the reign of Christ Jesus are sent into the world, just as the Father sent Him into the world. They will be sent with the same gospel of the kingdom as ambassadors of reconciliation. Jesus came into the world “... to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” The offense of the gospel for those who are perishing is not minimized to gain acceptance. The whole counsel of God is proclaimed, as an “...aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved.”<sup>124</sup>

**Spiritual Growth (in agape, faith, service and perseverance):** Deeds are greater than at First, showing growth toward the maturity of Christ Jesus. “Good works” are performed in the world motivated by agape. The Church is assaulting the spiritual strongholds of darkness with the light of the Word, and the gates of hell do not overcome it. The members of Christ’s body are in the world but not of the world. They know the unchurched and their needs serving them in the name of Christ Jesus as bridges for the gospel of the kingdom and demonstration of Christ’s love. Moreover, members demonstrate interdependency on each one’s spiritual gifts, and leaders encourage exercise the of every member’s gifts for the edification of all.

**Authentic Spiritual Life:** Not an appearance of being "alive," but rather true spirituality is expressed. One does not “accept” Jesus as an add-on to one’s life. One surrenders to Him as Lord – the old life is crucified. It involves repentance from self-rule. There will be a clear understanding that conversion is a change of allegiance. Now Christ Jesus is Lord. To live is Christ. Furthermore, one joins a new people. There is no relationship with Jesus apart from his Body the Church. “...so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” The proof of God's Spirit indwelling members will be a Christlike life being transformed into His image individually and corporately.

**Discipline/Repentance:** Leaders and members take sin seriously, respond to God's correction with repentance, and exercise church discipline. Members submit to their leaders. Leaders rule well as those accountable to Christ as Lord of the Church.

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<sup>124</sup> II Cor. 2:15. ESV.

**Obedience to the Word:** "You have kept my word and not denied my name." "Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him." Therefore, God has put before this church an open door no one can shut to make disciples of all peoples. The Lord's purpose is primary.

**Passion for the Cause of Christ:** Not "lukewarm;" rather God's purpose in Christ Jesus causes their hearts to burn as Christ opens the scripture to them concerning himself. The Church is sending its members *into the world* as ambassadors of reconciliation to make disciples of panta ta ethne (all peoples). The church serves as an equipping station for those sent to the front lines in the world. Biblical worship is practiced that edifies the faith of believers who gather in the presence of a Holy God to glorify Him alone, through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone according to the Scriptures alone.

**Humility:** Members know they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked without Christ Jesus and his grace and provision. There is demonstrated humility among "undershepherds" and among members. In the presence of the Lord Christ Jesus there can be no arrogance. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." All the beatitudes will be expressed creating a safe and edifying environment. The "Sermon on the Mount" will be lived-out by God's grace and power (Christ in you willing and doing righteousness). Members understand and are grateful for Christ's perfect life and righteousness being imputed to them; clothing them in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

**Fellowship with Christ Jesus:** Christ Jesus is invited to be in the midst of everything. His worth is celebrated. Gatherings are encouraged where "one anothering," prayer, Bible teaching and intimate communion with Jesus and each other take place. Prayer is practiced as a central part of the gathering of the Body of Christ. Prayer is seen as essential to a right relationship to God and the "proper working" of the Body. Prayer is for boldness to speak the Word and for becoming one in heart and soul. Boldness is expressed in proclaiming the whole truth of the gospel demonstrated by lives in submission to God and each other given as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. God's worth is celebrated in songs of praise and thankfulness remembering the Lord's supper and the Apostle's teaching. Moreover, fellowship with other Christians is considered a vital part of sharing in Christ's life.

## Chapter

# 6

## Doing Church God's Way

### Proper Functioning of The Body

**T**he early church experienced rapid growth. After Pentecost there were 3000 new converts that needed to be discipled. If we can assume that the same strategy that Jesus had taught the twelve continued, then each of the 120 disciples would have 25 new Christians to disciple. If each of the 120 was training an apprentice, then each would have approximately 12 disciples (do the math). In other words, what we see is that the strategy that Jesus taught His disciples prepared the early church to be able to handle 3000 converts in one day. They met in homes in groups of about 12 devoting themselves to the Apostle's doctrine, breaking bread, prayer and fellowship.<sup>125</sup> In Acts 20:20 we learn that some time later when the church even larger they were still "taught ... publicly and from house to house." Moreover, by then there were many thousands added to the church and as they structured and managed the fellowship of the church "the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem."<sup>126</sup>

The Apostle Paul continued this strategy as he trained disciples who trained disciples and met in homes. But consider this; the Apostle Paul near the end of his ministry career could say "the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit."<sup>127</sup> In one generation using the strategy Jesus taught and modeled, the gospel had gone to "all the world." Is there any doubt that God stands ready to bring forth the same fruit "in all the world" today if we follow his strategy for making disciples of "all peoples" (ta ethne). The simple strategy of self-multiplying structures, i.e. disciples that are taught to obey all that Jesus commanded within the context of dyads and small groups that reproduce those who can teach others who can teach others. These spiritual incubators are capable of spiritually nurturing as many as God adds to His

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<sup>125</sup> . Acts 2:42. ESV.

<sup>126</sup> Acts 6:6. ESV.

<sup>127</sup> Col. 1:5-6. ESV.

Kingdom and entrusts to the Church to disciple. It is the only structure that can keep up with an endless flow of new Christians and present them mature in Christ. And the overhead is low.

Today, some megachurches have been convicted that they are not fulfilling the biblical criterion for the success and health of the Body of Christ. As a result they have repented of being a “preaching station” drawing large crowds of “seekers” to Sunday services and providing church programs for “consumers” who do not go on to the maturity of Christ. These churches are attempting to define “making disciples” biblically and change the infrastructure of the church to support disciple-making systems.<sup>128</sup> They measure and evaluate ministry by the good “fruit” it produces defined by equipping every member for ministry and providing opportunities for ministry. By grace they have determined to present every member mature in Christ to receive the reward of hearing “...well done good and faithful servant.”<sup>129</sup> They have determined to use the full measure of grace God has given the Church - the spiritual gifts of all members functioning properly. In this way (God’s way) God gets the glory. The “mighty works” of man even in the name of Jesus glorifies man and elicits the response from Jesus, “I never new you.”<sup>130</sup>

Moreover, many of these congregations have developed an equipping culture and infrastructure composed of self-multiplying structures. These structures provide opportunity for every member’s gift to contribute to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. Each member is part of a team in which their ministry gifts function in concert with others for the edification of the whole Body. Members grow in awareness of their interdependence on the Body of Christ to reach the maturity in Christ they desire. Each member of Christ’s Body takes on new significance. All are needed for all to reach their full potential in glorifying God. There is a growing mutual respect and appreciation for each other and how God has gifted each one to contribute to the building up of the Body. The so-called lesser parts are not neglected. Rather, it respects how “God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.”<sup>131</sup>

## Biblical Worship

Jesus says that the Father is seeking those who worship in spirit and truth. This indicates that God desires worship and has told His church how to worship – in spirit and truth. Determining what this means biblically is a place to start in discovering God’s way for doing corporate worship. Another place to start is to ask, who is worship for, and who is able to worship in spirit and truth? Worship must have an object. If the object of the church’s worship is not the God revealed in Jesus Christ according to the Scripture it is idolatry. Moreover,

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<sup>128</sup> RiverLakes Community Church, Bakersfield, CA. is a church this author has had personal involvement with. Also see Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001). At the end of each chapter churches are given as examples of “Equipping Heroes.” Many are Megachurches that have discovered the biblical model of equipping all members for the work of ministry. See also, Carl F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution* (Grand rapids: Revell, 1994). Each chapter gives examples from churches over 750 in attendances that are learning to mobilize the gifts of lay members for the work of the ministry. However, in the opinion of this author not all of the churches listed in either of these texts are biblically sound theologically.

<sup>129</sup> Matt. 25:21.

<sup>130</sup> Matt. 7:23. ESV.

<sup>131</sup> I Cor. 12:24-25 NASV.

Scripture reveals the elements that God desires in worship. Some worship elements revealed in Scripture are prayer, thankfulness, confession of sin, Scripture reading, preaching, expositing God's meaning of Scripture, singing God's praises, administering the sacraments, bringing tithes and offerings, gathering on the Lord's day and fellowship with God and other Christians. This list is not exhaustive. However, anything that is not specified or deduced from Scripture should not be included. Worship structure includes biblical elements and the arrangement of these elements in an orderly manner appropriate to gathering in the presence of a holy God. These elements of worship are an expression of faith by those indwelt by God's Spirit, those able to discern spiritual truths and those who know personally the one who is the object of their worship. Worship services are open to the public but not for the public. Worship is a gathering of the family, the Body of Christ. It is not an evangelistic meeting. It is not religious entertainment. It is not a reflection of the world. In fact, in the early church those who were not Christians were afraid to attend gatherings of Christians for worship. Those Gentiles who did attend were drawn by God, convicted of their sin by what they witnessed, and fell on their faces proclaiming God's presence among them. Worship for the early church was serious business. For Scripture warns, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.<sup>132</sup>

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.<sup>133</sup>

The worship of God is the task of highest priority for Christians. God has revealed how He desires to be worshipped. This belief has been a foundational doctrine for centuries but today sounds like a radical idea. **Evangelism is for the purpose of gathering God's elect for worship**, true worship in spirit and truth. The Kingdom has come with the King – Christ Jesus. The church at worship is the gathering of those over whose lives Christ reigns. The gospel is the heart of this worship as it proclaims and praises God for who Jesus is and what He has done to reconcile God's elect to himself. The church never goes beyond the gospel it only goes deeper. Those that God's Spirit draws and regenerates at the hearing of the gospel "fit in" because they have passed from death to life. Their greatest "felt need" is a fellowship of authentic worshipers who demonstrate that God is in their midst. A fellowship of those "set apart" from the world. True seekers drawn by God are escaping the world they are not looking for a church like the world. Reformed worship will include the:

"...singing of psalms, ...biblically based, hermeneutically sound expository preaching of the Holy Scripture, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, as interpreted by the Westminster Confession of Faith and the two Westminster Catechisms. Reformed worship will also include contemplation of God's holy law in keeping with the law-gospel paradigm....Our carnal and antinomian age is in desperate need of a healthy dose of the law of God."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Heb. 10:31.

<sup>133</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, Together With The Larger and The Shorter Catechism, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education & Publication PCA Bookstore, 1990), XXI/i.

<sup>134</sup> Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, Op. cit., p-874.

A suggested liturgy follows an order of service that begins with a call to worship, a hymn or psalm, an opening prayer of adoration and supplication, a corporate reciting of the Lord's prayer, an the Old Testament lesson which confronts with God's sovereign majesty and their sinfulness, a prayer of confession and partition for pardon, assurance of pardon, hymn of thanksgiving for God's grace, offering, prayer of intercession, a New Testament lesson with instruction for living the Christian life, proclamation of the Word, hymn of preparation of the heart for reception of God's Word, pastoral prayer for illumination, Sermon Scripture reading, sermon, prayer for application, hymn of response, Lord's table, benediction.<sup>135</sup> Worship is by Christians for God.

## Pastoral Role

The biblical calling of those who staff disciple making-churches is the equipping the members for the work of the ministry. This new breed of ministers are called, trained and have a proven track record of equipping members for the work of the ministry who in turn can train others. Mostly, they are recruited in-house from within those congregations with this biblical model for the church. Some serve as non-paid staff and are accorded full recognition with paid staff and given a ministry budget. The seminaries are slowly changing to train the right persons for this role within the church. Some are offering educational models for resourcing those who are functioning in an equipper role and who are managing the support structures for members that are doing the work of the ministry. Those with leadership, nurture and management gifts (shepherds) are learning the skills needed to coach (teach) and manage discipling systems. Moreover, those persons with preaching gifts are freed to preach and pray without having to oversee the discipling structures of the church. This structure follows the biblical example to "...seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."<sup>136</sup> Some churches differentiate between ruling elders and teaching elders serving as a team of called and gifted leaders with clearly differentiated responsibilities.<sup>137</sup>

Notice in the Acts 6 passage these men were chosen to be "over this business." They were men given oversight who mobilized the gifts of members to do the work of the ministry. Furthermore, notice what happened as a result of this correction to the working of the Body. "And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith."<sup>138</sup> The traditional call to ministry has differed from the above role for elders. Churches were generally small composed of one paid minister with one or two paid support staff. Seminaries trained men for this role. Men who felt a call to minister to people personally and preach were trained with the expectation that they would do the work of the ministry. Members were expected to defer to the professional "with a call" to do most of the ministry and meet the spiritual needs of a congregation. In this traditional model most men entered the ministry because they had a desire to minister to people personally or to preach. They did not see their primary role as an overseer, mobilizer, equipper, and organizer of the ministry of others. Moreover, few had the leadership and management gifts required. The result in many congregations has been a pattern of

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<sup>135</sup> Adapted from suggested liturgy by Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, p-876.

<sup>136</sup> Acts 6:2-4. NKJV.

<sup>137</sup> Book of Order, Presbyterian Church In America, Chapter 7-2.

<sup>138</sup> Acts 6:7. ESV.

discord and dysfunctional ministry relationships within the Body of Christ.<sup>139</sup> To protect the health of the fellowship the gift of administration must be mobilized and respected. The church must choose “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.” The phrase translated “appoint over this business” means to “set someone over, to put someone in charge.”<sup>140</sup>

Some congregations have reached megachurch size but are still using the traditional model for a small congregation. They hire professional specialized pastors to minister to the needs of members of age-graded sub-congregations. Thus, a congregation of 3000 will hire approximately fifteen full-time trained professionals and seven to eight support personnel to do the work of the ministry. When a sub-congregation grows larger than one professional can pastor, then part-time specialists are hired to assist in the work of the ministry (much like adding staff to a small traditional church). In addition, members are recruited to help the professional staff with the work of the ministry. The professional staff is evaluated on how well each ministry is serving the “needs” of their sub-congregation’s members. Approximately 80% of the members in these churches are consumers of the ministry of professionals and their volunteer helpers. The criterion for the success of the church’s ministry is not the discipleship of every member to maturity. The church staff is not evaluated by how well members are being equipped to minister as God has called each one and gifted each one. Instead, staff is evaluated by how pleased the “consumers” are with the church programs (especially the highly vocal members who are large financial contributors).

What is interesting is that the small traditional church only involves approximately 20% of its members in ongoing ministry that directly touches lives, and few are discipled to become “equipped for every good work.”<sup>141</sup> Most utilize the precious volunteer hours of members attending meetings of boards, committees and councils. Yet it is less obvious in the small church partly because the close family-like relationships mask the shallow spiritual growth of members. The megachurch accentuated the need for intentional discipleship of its members. It revealed that consumers of church programs were not necessarily biblical disciples. By contrast, the biblical criterion for making disciples is each member working properly and together reaching toward the maturity of Christ.<sup>142</sup>

The change that is taking place in megachurches that are “making disciples” who go on to greater spiritual maturity is more of a culture change than a programmatic change. Church programs are repurposed with a focus on quality discipleship as a criterion for effectiveness. Moreover, throughout the programs of the church small groups that function as spiritual incubators are encouraged. In these smaller environments every member’s spiritual gift is valued and given opportunity to contribute to the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. And, small groups develop into ministry teams as members grow spiritually toward the maturity of Christ. Connectedness, interdependency and mutual care for one another becomes central to how ministry is carried out. Appreciation for how “God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for

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<sup>139</sup> I Cor. 12:24-25. ESV.

<sup>140</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 286 & 391.

<sup>141</sup> II Tim. 3:16-17. ESV.

<sup>142</sup> Eph. 4:1-16. ESV.

one another.”<sup>143</sup> Thus the whole Body begins to “...grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ; from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”<sup>144</sup> It should not be concluded by this observation that every church should become a megachurch. What is encouraging about this trend in some megachurches is the discovery that there is a biblical model for doing church God’s way. Making disciples who can make disciples and mobilizing every member’s God given ministry gift is possible. God’s way works and He gets the glory.

## Gift of Administration

We are not to be ignorant of spiritual gifts given by God’s Spirit to build up the church.<sup>145</sup> The proper functioning of all the gifts is necessary for a healthy church. The gift of administration (governing) serves to facilitate the proper working of each member in expressing each one’s spiritual gift for the up building of the Body of Christ.<sup>146</sup> Part of the proper exercising of the gift of administration is speaking the truth in love motivated by a desire to see the Body grow up into its head, into Christ. Therefore, tough love is sometimes needed for the good of the individual and the health of the Body of Christ. Church discipline, when necessary, ensures the health of the church. Those with the gift of administration have the fortitude to administer church discipline fairly but firmly when required.

Humility in serving the Body with this gift is essential. Those who govern are to be examples of servants who must give an account to Christ.<sup>147</sup> This gift will show wisdom in applying principles of management. Things will be done in order according to a plan that supports the accomplishment of God’s purposes in Christ. Therefore, those who exercise the spiritual gift of administration will speak the Word of God to the church persuasively, and provide an example of faith that produces Christlikeness.<sup>148</sup> Not all who serve as Elders will have the gift of administration. But all elders must demonstrate an ability to manage their households well. Without this gift being valued and allowed expression it will be difficult for the leadership to rule well.<sup>149</sup>

Individuals with the spiritual gift of administration will value every member’s contribution; even those who seem weaker or less honorable will be treated as indispensable, even given greater honor.<sup>150</sup> The gift of administration fosters an attitude of interdependence. Members will see themselves as “members of one

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<sup>143</sup> I Cor. 12:24-25 NAS

<sup>144</sup> Eph. 4:15-16. ESV.

<sup>145</sup> I Corinthians 12:1-1). ESV.

<sup>146</sup> Romans 12:8; Ephesians 4:15-16. ESV.

<sup>147</sup> I Peter 5:1-5; Hebrews 13:1). ESV.

<sup>148</sup> Hebrews 13:7; I Timothy 3:1-5.

<sup>149</sup> I Timothy 3:1-5).

<sup>150</sup> I Corinthians 12:22-24.

another” who succeed together or not at all.<sup>151</sup> One with the gift of administration will love the church in spite of its shortcomings, and will understand the “aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, he will facilitate ministering environments that are person-centered as well as task-centered. He knows that in an environment where Christlike love reigns, people will be the most productive. Therefore, the gift of administration facilitates relationships characterized by love. To accomplish this one must model and insist on total honesty and fairness to preserve a *good conscience* toward each other. And, *sincere faith* will inspire and motivate a biblical vision for the church. Finally, one with this gift will establish values that encourage *purity of heart*.

## Self-Multiplying Structures

Healthy self-multiplying structures form the building blocks for a healthy congregation capable of caring for and discipling as many persons as God sees fit to entrust it with. Moreover, less paid staff time is required.

It seems that those with spiritual gifts that are not associated with leadership are overlooked in most discipleship training. Yet a close reading of Paul’s charge to Timothy does not indicate that he is exclusively charged to train leaders who can train leaders. Rather he says, “The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Since Timothy is a young leader, and the two epistles include qualifications for leaders, those persons with gifts generally not recognized as leadership material are sometimes overlooked as essential for the “proper working” of the Body. Or at least their development is less important than those with leadership potential as we have been accustomed to defining it. However consider that:

“...the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”<sup>153</sup>

This scripture tells us that all members are important. Moreover, it also identifies one source of schism in the church. When the “less honored” members are not given greater honor (as God does) than the more esteemed members, then the seeds of schism are sown.

Persons with the spiritual gifts of “helps,” “service,” “mercy,” “giving,” “administration,” etc. need to be taught the skill sets necessary to pass on their ministry to others with like gifts. Moreover, giving honor to those with these gifts keeps the Body healthy. Providing training and forums for the expression of their gifts honors them. When people feel valued they are less likely to be vulnerable to schism.

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<sup>151</sup>Romans 12:4; I Corinthians 12:7.

<sup>152</sup>I Timothy 1:5.

<sup>153</sup>I Cor. 12:22-25. ESV

Small groups provide the context for all spiritual gifts to be expressed. But again leadership is given the primary attention. If those with the gift of mercy were intentionally trained and given opportunity to express this gift, in the context of small group life, this would legitimize this ministry and show honor to those with this gift. The same could be provided for the other gifts.

By intentionally giving honor to all the gifts and the opportunity for expression, self-multiplying structures will model in microcosm Body life for the upbuilding of the whole Body. This will take the form of ministry dyads and triads within each small group or ministry team. Skills, standards and protocols are captured and passed on as training modules for new members.

The disciple or learner when he or she is fully taught becomes like their teacher in that they in turn can teach or disciple another who in turn can disciple another "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher."<sup>154</sup> The Apostle Paul charged his disciple Timothy, "The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."<sup>155</sup> The phrase "among many witnesses" may refer to those who could attest to the divine authenticity of Paul's teaching such as Barnabas and Luke and others who were even eyewitnesses of Jesus life and death. There was a body of sound doctrine that was entrusted to the church that must be taught and defended against those who would contradict it.<sup>156</sup> The multiplication of faithful men referred to in II Tim. 2:2 is four generations (Paul to Timothy; Timothy to another faithful disciple; Timothy's disciple to another faithful disciple). This makes the Apostle Paul the spiritual great-grandfather of faithful disciples through Timothy alone. Moreover, Timothy was only one of the Apostle Paul's faithful disciples. Thus, we see a strategy of reproduction starting with Jesus and His disciples. In the "upper room" there were "about a hundred and twenty" representing the eleven apostles and their disciples. If each of Jesus' disciples had with them an average of ten to twelve disciples there would be "about a hundred and twenty."<sup>157</sup>

## Dyad Skill Sets

### Ministry Dyad

*Definition:* Two individuals maintaining a spiritually significant relationship with a mutual commitment to the other's maturity in Christ *and* the completion of the "Great Commission."

This is the fundamental ministry unit serving the proper functioning of the Body of Christ. The early church provides us with many examples: Jesus and John; Jesus and Peter; Barnabas and Paul; Barnabas and Mark; Paul and Mark; Paul and Timothy; Paul and Silas; Timothy and Silas; Paul and Aquila; Priscilla and Aquila; Paul and Tychicus; Tychicus and Onesimus; Paul and Titus; Paul and Luke; etc.

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<sup>154</sup> Luke 6:40. ESV.

<sup>155</sup> II Tim. 2:2. ESV.

<sup>156</sup> II Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:1-5; Titus. ESV.

<sup>157</sup> Acts 1:1. ESV.

In the early church ministry dyads functioned as the basic ministry structure for personal spiritual growth, training and shared ministry. These relationships were strategically transferred to others, thus forming a growing number of discipling ministry dyads. This frequently resulted in triads and small bands of disciples ministering together. Jesus encouraged this structure when he sent out his disciples two by two to plant small congregations in homes.<sup>158</sup> Paul used the same strategy to plant churches among the Gentiles, as evidenced by the many references to disciples who had churches that met in their homes and his own example of forming ministry dyads.

### **Microskills**

The following microskills are the basic skill sets needed to function successfully together in a ministry dyad:

*Encouragement* - Recognizing the other's strengths and how to use them for the edification of the Body of Christ and skill in transparently sharing oneself and God's faithfulness.

*Empathetic listening* - Listening to the other with the love of Christ. Skill in giving the other regular feedback that assures the other that you understood both meaning and feelings.

*Speaking the truth in love* - Using the truth of scripture as the primary teacher. Giving the benefit of observation of the other's behavior by one who cares using skill in confronting the other when behavior is inconsistent with Christlikeness.

*Personal life planning* - Ability to help the other develop a personal life plan that contributes to the completion of the Great Commission.

*Accurately interpreting scripture* - One is able to use exegetical tools and methods for accurately interpreting scripture.

*Confidence keeping* - Having the Ability to keep information learned about the other confidential unless permission is given to divulge and skill in protecting confidential information.

*Prayer* - Having the ability to intercede on behalf of others and skill in praying with others.

*Play* - The Ability to enjoy the other as a person and skill in interrelating joyfully.

*Apprentice Development* - How to pass on ministry dyad skills to others as a lifestyle

*Empower and release* - Skill in letting go.

### **Application**

Dyads offer ministry opportunities for any growing Christian. In a healthy small group, for instance, growing Christians can function as an important extension of the leadership nucleus if they develop a ministry dyad with another group member. As the members of a dyad attempt to support each other's spiritual growth toward Christlikeness, the need for certain of the above mentioned microskills will become apparent. Moreover, each has a spiritual gift(s) to offer the other. In addition, they can learn and practice skills provided by the larger

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<sup>158</sup> Lk. 10:1-12 NAS

Body of Christ on audiotape, videotape or by written materials. Thus, growing Christians whose personalities cause them to see up-front leadership roles as threatening can participate in a vital one to another ministry.

Members grow in awareness of their interdependence on the Body of Christ to reach the maturity in Christ they desire. Each member of Christ's Body takes on new significance. All are needed for all to reach their full potential in glorifying God. There is a growing mutual respect and appreciation for each other and how God has gifted each one to contribute to the building up of the Body. The so-called inferior parts are not neglected. Rather, "God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another."<sup>159</sup> All the gifts are to be mobilized both male and female.

By contrast, when the first priority in church structure and function is placed on large groups, those with oratory, leading and organizing skills are accorded the greater honor. Frequently, those members with the greatest potential for encouraging spiritual maturity are overlooked. The rich contribution these "inferior" members can make to the edification of the Body are often lost, or at least, not encouraged in the same way as the "superior" members. Small groups and dyads provide the opportunity for every member to express their spiritual gifts. As a result, discord and dysfunctional Body life, are reduced.

Ministry dyads are the basic building blocks of a church structure that exalts the equipping of every member for the work of the ministry. Every member learns the skills needed to support the spiritual growth of another toward the maturity of Christ, and is in a relationship in which each member is accountable. All the other levels of ministry and leadership in the church have as one of their primary function to support "one-anothering" relationships. By giving "honor" to the proper working of ministry dyads *all* are encouraged to do the work of the ministry and *all* have opportunity to contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ. The result is less discord and increased bodily growth.

If small group leaders and their apprentices are modeling a healthy ministry dyad, they will be taking the first step in encouraging the development of dyads between members of the group. In addition, if they share the personal blessings of this commitment to each other's spiritual growth, and the microskills that they are learning together, they will be equipping their group members for a lifetime of fruitful ministry.

As relationships develop with pre-Christians, the small group provides an entryway into the Body life of the church where others are sharing the same goal of helping each other to know God and become more like His son Christ Jesus. Thus, the assimilation process is accelerated and the Christian witness multiplied. In a like manner, when the pre-Christian attends the congregation's worship celebration with a member of his or her small group, there is greater identification with the larger Body of Christ. The subsequent exposures to the larger gathering of the Church all lend support to the basic work of the ministry achieved at the ministry dyad level where one life influences another with the gospel.

In summary, encouragement and resourcing of ministry dyads insures every member a meaningful ministry. Ministry dyads provide the basic skill sets and form the basic building blocks for healthy small groups and ministry teams. They provide basic training for the work of the ministry at any level in the church organization. Moreover, they exalt the ministry importance of every member thus reducing discord within the Body of Christ.

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<sup>159</sup> I Cor. 12:24-25 NAS

By not exalting every member of the Body of Christ the seeds of discord are sown. This has been especially true in the case of women's spiritual ministry gifts not being mobilized.

## Mobilizing All Member's Gifts <sup>160</sup>

More energy is wasted trying to restore unity and reconciliation in the church than is spent on all the evangelistic efforts of the church. When the church is captive to divisions and conflict it robs it of its vitality and gives the world cause to reject its message. Many of these divisions can be traced to the dysfunction of the gifts. When the church structure does not facilitate all members of the Body being joined and knit together, so that each makes their contribution to the building up of the whole, growth is retarded. Scripture teaches that when *every* member of the Body is functioning properly (according to their gifts), in right relationship to other members, spiritual and numerical growth results.<sup>161</sup> Structure can support or retard the proper functioning of the Body.<sup>162</sup> Structuring the church God's way facilitates the building up of the Body in love. All members must be valued and opportunity provided for each one's contribution to the edification of the Body.

Dishonoring attitudes toward women by male leaders have become almost institutionalized. The following are opinions expressed by six pastors interviewed by this observer. These comments give insight into the attitude barriers that must be removed before healthy male/female relationships can properly function for the edification of the Body.

Question posed to a group of six pastors: "What are the positive's and negative's for a women's ministry in the church?"

### Comments:

"Can cause men to retreat - abdicate leadership because women become more biblically literate and thus threaten men"

"Women become better trained so tend to take over ministries and do a better job than men - pastor must cater to the political power these women have"

"If leadership roles of authority and power are denied to women, they will build auxiliary structures such as mission organizations or women's ministries to satisfy their need to have meaningful ministry participation and have open to them leadership roles"

"If you train women in a good women's ministry you raise the level of expectation for ministry involvement, and if you don't have a place for them to minister meaningfully you create problems"

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<sup>160</sup> Excerpt from: Robert L. Brady, *Kingdom Interventionists, Volume I* (Bakersfield: Lyle Associates, 1998), 51-54.

<sup>161</sup> Eph. 4:11-16. NAS.

<sup>162</sup> Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream: ChurchSmart Resources 1996), p. 28. "The evaluation of the data from over 1000 churches on all continents was particularly interesting with regard to this quality (functional structures). ...the development of structures which promote an ongoing multiplication of the ministry. Leaders are not simply to lead, but also to develop other leaders."

“When women break into an area previously dominated by men such as a Board or Staff they raise the standards for professionalism. However, the camaraderie declines when women join men. And the competitiveness goes up.”

“I saw this happen to toastmasters in 1970 when they integrated the male and female chapters. The standards for performance went up, but the camaraderie went down. In addition, the critical analysis changed. It became a different environment, less effective in my opinion”

“I agree, men feel less safe with women involved - less relational - more defensive - so again less camaraderie”

“When men and women are separated there is a better learning environment”

“Takes a more aggressive woman to break into a male dominated environment. Men feel more comfortable dealing with an over aggressive male than an over aggressive female”

“Very competent women are more threatening to men. If they break a male barrier, they show less competent men up. Men should not tolerate poor performers on a Board, but they do because they don’t want to confront the issue. It keeps the standard lower so less is required. Women upset this, so are seen as a threat?”

“Maybe a church should not have a strong women’s ministry unless they also have a strong men’s ministry”

“Women’s ministries are so effective sometimes (e.g. BSF) that women develop a high expectation for quality teaching and organization that they judge the rest of the church by. When the pastor’s sermons don’t measure up or the church is not organized as well, they become critical and dissatisfied. This causes a defensive reaction by the pastor and male leadership. This is why pastors resist the formation of women’s ministries or keep them at arm’s length”

“Pastors are mostly passive-aggressive in their leadership style. They are non-confrontational and this becomes the norm. Women are more confrontational when given responsibility or authority. So they irritate or intimidate men. The men will either opt to not serve on a Board with women or take a passive role”

“Yes, this is even true for men who are strong aggressive managers in the secular world. They acquiesce to the pastor’s style of leadership in the church because it is his turf. Women don’t.”

“Yes, men tolerate poor management and leadership in the church when they would never tolerate it in their businesses. Men know they will have to pay the price to change things, and they know the price is to confront the poor performers - which may mean they will have to do more if they drive them out. Moreover, the poor performer is many times the pastor. Also, the norm in the church is to be non-judgmental of others. Women are less willing to go along with incompetence”

God gives grace to the humble. When a man does not exalt his wife by listening to her, treating her with respect and considering her needs, his prayers are hindered.<sup>163</sup> When a man has not learned to live considerately with his wife, bestowing honor on her, it is doubtful he will do so with other women in the church. Moreover, if this man becomes an Elder or leader in the church his prayers for the church are hindered. The primary responsibility of a church leader is to pray. Thus, the whole church suffers. This could be one reason the qualifications for an Elder includes being able to manage one’s household and be a husband of one wife (implication be in right relationship with one’s wife). When any member of the Body of Christ is not honored,

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<sup>163</sup> 1 Peter 3:7 NAS

all suffer. The Bible says God exalts the weaker less honored members so that there will be no division within the Body.<sup>164</sup> For, we are individually members of one another. When women are not given full opportunity to contribute to the edification of the whole Body, they are dishonored. This sows the seeds of discord within the Body. Appropriate biblical roles that mobilize the gifts of women contributes to the “proper working” of the Body and reduces division within the Body of Christ the church.

The servant leadership paradigm is biblical and effective. When women do what comes naturally, they model a biblical paradigm for leadership and management of ministries. The so-called feminine skills women have developed in building good working relationships in women’s ministries, i.e. team-building, honoring each other as equals by sharing power and information, facilitating, encouraging participation, cheer leading to get others excited about their work, building up the other’s self worth, nurturing, listening, etc. are the very skills the corporate world is rewarding in the new management paradigm. Jesus modeled this and told church leaders specifically not to lord it over others. Yet, in the church this is slow to be accepted. The old management paradigm rewards power games, turf protection, having the information/answers, being in the know, being out front of others, toughness and dominance. Sadly, this is practiced all too often in the church. Moreover, for this reason many men are uncomfortable with women in leadership. These men have not learned the biblical role of servant leadership.

Ironically, exercising authority over others, or the classical management paradigm, is being replaced in the corporate world by a new paradigm very much like servant leadership in the Bible. The reason the new management paradigm is being accepted in the corporate world is because it empowers people and releases their creativity thus increasing their productivity. The result is higher quality of output and greater competitiveness, thus higher profits. The “new” paradigm encourages investment in building people and helping every worker reach their full potential. Thus, the very skills women have used to build effective well organized women’s ministries are in demand in the corporate world, but ironically not recognized in many churches. Moreover, these are the very skills and attitudes taught in Scripture. Thus, God’s way of exalting the weaker or seemingly “inferior parts” of the Body is the best way to have no divisions and to edify the Body in love. Principles for mobilizing the spiritual gifts God’s Spirit has given to women are well outlined in an excellent resource by Susan Hunt and J. Ligon Duncan.<sup>165</sup>

## Small Group Infrastructure

A small group infrastructure provides spiritual incubators for discipleship and care of members. It also serves as a "farm club" for developing lay leadership. Lay leaders gain hands-on ministry experience, as they become part of the ministerial ministry care system. They become "deputized" lay ministers to four or five families that meet weekly or bi-weekly in a home or at the church. These lay ministers are in turn "coached" and encouraged by another lay leader in a one-on-one relationship. The staff pastors then "coach" the coaches, thus insuring a

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<sup>164</sup> I Cor. 12:24-25 NAS

<sup>165</sup> Susan Hunt and J. Ligon Duncan, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006).

span of care of one to five or less. Lay leaders are resourced and disciplined as they use the spiritual gifts God has given them for the building up of the Body of Christ.<sup>166</sup>

Small groups, properly organized and resourced, provide the best environment for spiritual growth. Jesus modeled this and the early church used it as the primary strategy for making disciples. For the most part the institutional model for the church has lost this truth giving priority to large and medium sized groups. The church is only beginning to recover from this mistake. If this sounds dogmatic or biased, I can only answer that I know of no better way to nurture disciples toward Christlikeness than a properly functioning network of small groups. A small group is 8 to 12 in average attendance meeting at least every two weeks, preferably in a home. Moreover, I know of no better way to provide hands-on training for lay leaders, than a system of mentoring within the context of a small group network. Newcomers find a “place” in the congregation without having to be “adopted” by heritage families.

Although most churches have small groups, they are not necessarily intentional discipleship groups. Many deliver good Bible teaching but are not structured in such a way to provide systematic nurture for spiritually growing Christians. The key to effectiveness is intentional spiritual nurture and care, through personal prayer and sharing spiritual experiences with others, as each strives to apply biblical truth in their lives. Group leaders need support by “coaching” leaders and by training that increases their skill in pastoral care and facilitation of small group life. The opportunity that small groups provide to disciple lay leaders as they deliver hands-on pastoral care to several families is little understood or practiced in most churches.

Focus on “households” as the basic building blocks for a healthy congregation. God structured creation around family relationships and in Scripture blesses households that obey God’s Word. God has appointed the husband as the head of each household and holds him responsible for the spiritual nurture of its members. Leadership skills are learned by managing one’s household, and only those who demonstrate they can manage their households well are qualified to manage the church.<sup>167</sup> Together with godly character this is an essential qualification for an Overseer. Without the demonstrated ability to manage one’s household a man should not be considered for leadership in Christ’s church.

Make strengthening families a high priority. Teach men how to be the spiritual head of their families and teach women how to biblically submit to their husbands.<sup>168</sup> Teach parents how to nurture their children in the Word and how to be “in submission with all reverence.” Healthy families make healthy churches.

Use the homes of spiritually healthy families as the basis for small group ministry. Groups that meet in homes can be a place to bring unchurched friends who find discussing spiritual issues easier in the informality of a home (especially a friend’s home). They provide a model of Christian households. Moreover, it is often more productive in reaching new people if you conduct the small group in the home of growing Christians who are recent converts. However, be sure the family life in these homes is modeling the above mentioned essentials for healthy families. New Christians have a contagious faith and a larger network of non-Christian friends and

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<sup>166</sup>Carl F. George, *Nine Facets of the Effective Small-Group Leader* (Diamond Bar: Center for the Development of Leadership for Ministry, 1994). Video library series. Excellent resource for training “coaching leaders” and small group leaders.

<sup>167</sup>I Tim. 3:4-5.

<sup>168</sup>Titus. 2:4-5.

family than do long tenured congregants. Many unchurched people will attend a small Bible study/fellowship in a home when they will not attend a meeting at the church facility. Maybe, this why Jesus and the Apostle Paul used this strategy.<sup>169</sup>

### **Ministry Teams**

One of the very basic *forms* of the kingdom is team ministry. Jesus established this and the early church continued it. Ministry was delivered by those who were sent by twos (dyads) and in small bands. This allowed personal one-on-one mentoring to take place as hands-on ministry was being delivered. This strategy also created spiritual incubators that greatly facilitated and accelerated the spiritual growth of members. Training took place where lives were touched, thus, truth was applied as it was learned. No sterile classroom teaching using theoretical situations or hours of committee meetings making decisions for others. Those who are delivering the ministry that touches lives make the ministry decisions. Learning is driven by real needs and by questions that arise as ministry is delivered. One's ministry gifts are discovered and confirmed by other members as one's gifts are complemented and built up the Body. The use of "spiritual gifts questionnaires" is unnecessary.

Every time in history there has been a great renewal or spiritual revival of the church it has been accompanied by a rediscovery of the strategies Jesus taught his disciples, i.e. mentoring relationships and small groups as the primary ministry delivery system. Great preaching brings conviction of sin and repentance, but disciples are taught to obey all Jesus commanded by twos and in small bands. Large events and mid-sized gatherings have their place, but cannot provide the environment where transfer of life takes place as in dyads and small group relationships. This strategy is simple, portable and expandable as the church grows.

Providing opportunities for meaningful ministry involvement is the challenge every church faces. Ministry that touches and changes lives is meaningful. Ministry teams can offer fellowship, personal spiritual growth and the opportunity to be used by God to change lives. Spiritual growth is facilitated by meaningful ministry involvement. When members are engaged in ministry they pray more, study the Bible more and discover their need for support in their own spiritual development. Ministry teams with a spiritual nurture component intentionally built in, become spiritual incubators for spiritual growth.

Ministry Teams are healthy nurture groups that have committed themselves to a ministry to persons outside the group as well as to one another. In addition to the ministry teams needed to keep the church programs going, outreach ministry teams find ways to serve such as: painting a paraplegic neighbor's house; serving lunch to homeless persons; minor car repair for single mothers; hospital visitation; missionary hospitality for those on home leave; writing encouraging notes and letters; child care during special events; shopping for shut-ins; providing transportation for elderly persons; tutoring; toy distribution; providing professional services to community poor; community recycling projects; child evangelism programs; unwed mother counseling, etc.

To involve the aging members of the congregation, some groups can be involved in a telecare<sup>170</sup> ministry that touches lives and surfaces needs that younger members can follow up on. Telecare is simply using the

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<sup>169</sup> Lk.10:1-7; Acts 20:20.

<sup>170</sup> Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown: Revel, 1991), 93-94.

telephone to contact members and ask if you can pray for a need in their life or their family or neighbor's lives. This reduces the number of persons who fall through the cracks and identifies opportunities for ministry that may otherwise go unreported.

### **Leadership Community**

Once a small group network develops, the strategy calls for adding to this structure a Leadership Community.<sup>171</sup> At this meeting, usually held at least once a month, all small group leaders and their apprentices meet, both in their individual "huddles" for nurture, prayer and decision making, and in a corporate meeting where the Senior Pastor presents a message aimed at the needs of leaders that keeps before them the ministry vision they share. In addition, a "skill" session should be conducted to meet the training needs of lay leaders. Thus, a leadership community provides a forum for developing shared vision, fellowship for leaders and practical training. Once the leaders have modeled this support system and shared the personal benefits, other leaders will be encouraged to join with them. *Do not force present leaders to attend.* However, expect attendance of all future leaders. You are building the care and discipling structure for future leaders and the next several hundred people God entrusts to your care.

The leadership community greatly facilitates timely communication. The small group leaders hear important information straight from the Senior Pastor and then pass it on to their small group members. Good communication strengthens leadership credibility. Increasing efforts to communicate with members and to provide them with the rationale and appropriate information that informs future decisions, will further increase confidence and trust. Also, communicating well in advance of making major decisions with everyone in the ministry organization and asking for their input builds trust. This helps to foster a partnership mentality in which everyone is considered important to the effective functioning of the Body of Christ. It is here that ownership of the vision develops.

### **Ministry Bridges**

Bridging events are usually medium sized group events that might interest an unchurched person who is a family member or friend of a church member. For instance, parenting classes, marriage enrichment events, codependency groups, social events, plays/ musicals, parenting classes for single parents, etc., are acquaintance-making opportunities with unchurched persons. Unchurched seekers need to see the Christian lifestyle demonstrated and biblical truth used to guide life's decisions. These events should provide opportunities for those God is drawing to Christ to see authentic Christianity in action. It is no time to hide your light under a bushel.

Unchurched women more often than men seek help in their marriages, parenting and personal support from the church. Ministries for women that provide acceptance and help for these women seeking spiritual guidance will lead whole families into the church. Insisting that one women's group or program can meet all needs for all ages is shortsighted. It can be fruitful to provide ministries for homemakers, working women, and all ages of women that focus on the different needs women have at various stages in their life. This will expand the opportunities for newcomers to assimilate. An effective ministry of women who are discipling and are ministering to other women is an important factor in the health of the church.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., pp. 135-148.

<sup>172</sup> Ti.2:3-5. ESV.

Likewise, a strong men's ministry with both small and medium sized groups can be entryways into the life of the church. Providing a variety of programs that serve all ages and needs increases the entryways into church life. These ministries can be augmented with barbecues, small group prayer and Bible studies that are effective in capturing the enthusiasm and commitment these men have gained at large group events. Again, spiritual nurture is best achieved in small groups.

New groups are easier to join than long established groups. Therefore, multiplying the number and variety of groups increases entryways for new people. Do not expect newcomers to join long-standing groups, Sunday school classes and other on-going ministries. Allow newcomers to bond with other newcomers and form new groups and ministries (especially men and women's small groups and ministry teams). If intentional hospitality (love for strangers) is encouraged and practiced, these "side door" ministries can assimilate whole families into the life of the church.

Children and youth programs determine, to a large degree, whether or not a young nesting stage family will find a church attractive. If the children like the Sunday school or youth ministry, the parents will give a church a second try. Unfortunately, in today's society if the children do not like the program, the parents will most likely not return. Moreover, as the church grows large and medium-sized events provide an attractive environment where youth will invite their friends. However, children, like adults, are best nurtured spiritually in small groups no matter how large the church. Small churches can offer healthy homes where living Christianity is modeled and parents are taught to fulfill their responsibility to train their children in the Scriptures.

## Mobilizing For The Harvest

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."<sup>173</sup>

Mobilizing for the harvest begins with focused prayer. We are instructed by Jesus to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers. Three things are clear from the above verse; the harvest is great, there is a need for workers, and the harvest is God's. Moreover, God is working already in the fields white for harvest.<sup>174</sup> We then, are to petition God to meet the need for workers who join Him in the fields that are "white." From this we learn that the potential harvest is great. Why then are an estimated 65% to 85% of churches that have been in existence from ten to twenty-five years plateaued or declining?<sup>175</sup> Part of the answer is little understanding of the harvest field by these churches. Another part of the answer is a focus on what the church is doing for God

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<sup>173</sup> Matt. 9:35-38. ESV.

<sup>174</sup> Jn. 5:17.

<sup>175</sup> Lyle Schaller, *44 Steps Up Off the Plateau* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p-23. Also see C. Kirk Hadaway, *Growing Off the Plateau* (Nashville: Sunday School Board for the Southern Baptist Convention, 1989).

instead of a focus what on what God is doing so they can join Him. Both result in praying amiss for workers for the harvest fields that are now "white for harvest."

Mobilizing involves "lifting our eyes" to see the fields "white for harvest." Only when a congregation understands the people God is preparing to receive the gospel can a discipleship process be developed that fits the current opportunities. Thus, the ministry systems are shaped to effectively communicate with and disciple those from "fields white for harvest" at this time in this place with ministry methods that identify and reap from God's harvest. Moreover, all ministry systems must be integrated to form an interdependent whole, functioning as the local Body of Christ capable of incarnating its ministry in an ever changing "field white for harvest."

When a congregation joins God in His ongoing work in the "fields white for harvest" the focus is less on preserving the facilities and style of ministry that worked in the past and more on the proper working of the Body of Christ to reap the harvest that is "white" now. When the whole counsel of God is preached, they see God's Spirit preparing hearts for the gospel and His Spirit convicting of sin, which leads to repentance. Then the joy of forgiveness floods the soul and grateful hearts replace hearts of stone. Only God can do this. The first love of a person born again of the Spirit is contagious. Others are infected and the gospel fire spreads from person to person so fast sometimes it seems as though whole families and groups receive God's grace simultaneously. Humanly, it feels like things are out of control. And so they are, out our control and in the hands of the Lord.

### **Seeing The Harvest Field**

A congregation cannot pray effectively for the "Lord of the harvest" to send workers if it is ignorant concerning the harvest field, i.e. those souls "white for harvest."<sup>176</sup> To pray effectively a congregation must study the community that exists today. The community a congregation was successful in "harvesting" ten to twenty-five years ago most likely has changed significantly. However, many of the congregations that are plateaued or declining in members after 10-25 years have not significantly changed their ministry strategy. This results in a typical pattern. Ministry forms that worked well for years begin to miss the newcomers who replaced the population that had been receptive to the congregation's ministry in the past. For instance, ladies teas that worked well as a way to get acquainted in the past among middle and upper middle-income women who were homemakers are less effective among lower-income lifestyle women who now compose the largest lifestyle segment within the drawing area of the church. Moreover, a high percentage of the current population is single working women and married women who work outside the home. Yet the ministry forums and methods offered are for homemakers.

Typically, as the community ages upwardly mobile families move to more affluent neighborhoods. Demographics begin to change creating a mosaic of different racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lifestyles many of which are not receptive to the current congregation's ministry. The receptive families of the past are replaced in the community by those whose lifestyle is different enough from the predominate lifestyle of church members as to make them feel uncomfortable when they attend. Thus, visitors do not return no matter how hard church members try to make them feel comfortable. Progressively large segments of the population do not respond to the congregation's ministry. Over time the congregation is composed of a few loyal members and their adult children who still live in the surrounding community or who have relocated and drive great

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<sup>176</sup> Jn. 4:35. ESV.

distances to attend. Long time members feel a sense of ownership and loyalty to the facilities and the style of ministry enjoyed by members. They are effectively blind to the current population "white for harvest."

Just because a congregation exists in the middle of a field "white for harvest," does not mean God will send workers from an existing congregation. Nor does it mean God will add those who are being saved to that congregation. The only effective ministry the existing congregation may have is to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers (the right workers). This allows God to change their thinking and open their eyes to what He is doing. The Lord of the harvest uses those who can incarnate themselves into the lifestyles and subcultures that form a mosaic of population groupings within the drawing areas of the local congregation. If there has been significant change in community demographics since the congregation was founded, the people match needed for effective communication and assimilation may no longer exist. Those who join God in the harvest develop missionary eyes to see what God is doing.

For too many congregations the assumption is that because a congregation exists in a community (especially if it has been there for a long time), it will be used to make disciples from those in the population surrounding the church building. This is the most common error made by churches. And, to compound the problem, it is commonly assumed that because there is a congregation in a particular community, there is no need for other congregations (especially of the same denomination or theological tradition). Thus, they pray amiss limiting their prayer to workers from the existing congregation. Those with missionary eyes develop ministry forums among the new population and mobilize workers from among persons in the new population. The gospel is carried through the existing people networks using forms and methods that incarnate the gospel within the culture of the new population.

Part of the error is the result of starting in the wrong place when thinking of the task. Jesus said, GO and make disciples of all peoples ... and lo I am with you always." Jesus did not say to bring the world into the church. He said to take the gospel into the world. When the church starts with "...seeing the fields white for harvest" the differences in people groups (cultures) becomes evident and prayer is directed for God to reveal how to communicate the gospel effectively within each people group. The local congregation must discover how to take the gospel into the world and "become all things to all men that by all means we might win some"<sup>177</sup> (i.e. become incarnational). The culture of those the congregation is trying to reach determines effective forms for doing ministry rather than the congregation's traditions. Creativity and innovation are encouraged. It learns to become incarnational. The way the congregation has always done it no longer holds it's thinking captive. Members begin to think strategically like missionaries. The best strategy may be to train and resource those who can be more effective among a particular people group than its own church members. Moreover, the particular people group may be those composing the largest segment in the present community population surrounding congregation. Thus, the best Kingdom strategy may be for the present congregation to decrease and those able to reach the present population increase. The same error is made when a congregation does not consider the differences in age preferences. To reach those among the next generation ministry forms and methods must change. Again, the incarnation among those we are trying to reach must determine forms and methods for doing ministry rather than traditions that worked well with a previous generation. Each generation must serve the next generation. Incarnation of the life and substance of the gospel requires new forms for ministry delivery. However, the forms chosen are the result of a careful study of the "fields white for harvest." It is a focus on the unchurched populations, learning their ways of socializing, communicating, and listening to their questions,

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<sup>177</sup> I Cor. 9:22.

their doubts and fears. Then, and only then, can a harvest strategy be effective. It is not a programmatic approach to the task; rather it is knowing about the unchurched in the particular field God has placed this congregation at this point in time.

A case in point is Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. In eight years it grew from one family to 5000 in weekly attendance attracting primarily "busters" and "young boomers" (approximately ages 20-35). Their senior pastor reports:

More than 80 percent of our growth comes from those previously unchurched. Every person who has been baptized, every new member, and every attendee at a discipleship event is surveyed so we can verify that statement. We know where they come from, how they got to us, and we have a snapshot of the state of their spiritual life before attending. We're reaching the unchurched at a rate that has astonished even us.<sup>178</sup>

In other words, this congregation saw the “fields white for harvest” and is joining the Lord of the Harvest through an incarnation of their ministry forms.

This consultant has served several churches that were very effective in reaching those in a certain population, built a worship center and educational buildings, and for many years God added to their numbers those he called to himself through Jesus Christ. However, because of a focus on their facilities, programs, methods and ways of doing ministry instead of “peoples,” they were blind to the fact that new "peoples" had displaced the once predominate "people group" they had been reaping a harvest from. The ways of doing ministry that had been successful in the past were not effective in reaching the new “peoples” now surrounding their church. In one case, after a thorough ministry audit, the consultant team recommended that the church sell their facilities to a new congregation that was meeting in a school nearby. God was using this new congregation to reach the largest new people group immediately surrounding the church buildings. Because the culture of the new congregation matched the culture of the new people group, God was using them to reach those that the older congregation could not. The older congregation sold their property to the growing congregation. As a result, the Kingdom was expanded and the Body of Christ was incarnational in that place once again.

Sadly, in another case, an older congregation that had been in decline for over ten years did not listen. They assumed that because they were there first, had sacrificed to build and pay for the church buildings, that God would use them to reach the new population. It was their turf. They rejected the consultant recommendations and stubbornly held onto their buildings for another ten years. During this time the membership declined to fourteen and was finally forced to sell the buildings. Wrong strategy! Wrong field! Wrong workers! Wrong focus!

### **Workers For The Harvest**

God sends workers He has prepared and called to the task. Jesus said that he is always with us as we make disciples.<sup>179</sup> He did not send us off on our own to do “mighty works” in his name.<sup>180</sup> Rather he told us to abide

<sup>178</sup> James Emery White, "Gateway Country," *Leadership*, Summer 2001, p.35.

<sup>179</sup> Matt. 28:20b. ESV.

<sup>180</sup> Matt. 7:21-23. ESV.

in him or we can do nothing. If he is with us, he is in charge. We are joining him in His work. Just as God sent Jesus into the world so Jesus sends us. He did not say bring the world into the church, but take the gospel of the Kingdom into the world. The church is for worship, training and sending Christians. To be healthy it must function properly as Scripture models and directs. It must mobilize its members for the “harvest.”

Therefore, our prayer for workers is a prayer that includes a willingness to be prepared for the task and to be sent to that part of the harvest where we can be most effective. It requires a tabernacle rather than a temple mindset. A tabernacle is a temporary dwelling place or shelter. A temple is a permanent structure. The new covenant makes the people of God the dwelling place of God. People are portable. We are sojourners, pilgrims with no permanent home in this world. We look toward the promise of a heavenly dwelling. We are here a short time to be ambassadors of reconciliation. Property and facilities are temporary means to this end, not ends in themselves. Therefore, facilities, methods and forms of ministry must be held lightly and shaped to meet the ability to form an incarnational ministry among all peoples. A missionary strategy is required.

Therefore, mobilizing for the harvest must include prayer that leads to repentance for making an idol of facilities and ministry forms that have outlived their effectiveness. Then God can open eyes to see Him and what He is doing in the current situation. To see the harvest that is “white” today.

God is incarnating His life within the world revealing His divine love. He is convicting the world of sin because they do not believe the Scriptures that reveal who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. We are His ambassadors of reconciliation. We represent a kingdom not of this world. The gospel has the power to rescue people from the kingdom of darkness and place them in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, under His reign, if we are following and abiding in Him – i.e. doing church God’s way.

#### **Conclusion**

The gathering of the Body of Christ for corporate worship according to God’s revealed ways is crucial for the health of the Body. The health of the Body is also dependent on biblical ways for teaching members to obey all Jesus has commanded. The church is dysfunctional when it does not do church God’s way.

The church has majored in large and medium sized ministry forums and marginalized the importance of discipleship dyads and small groups. All four are needed for a healthy balance. When the resources of the church are focused on providing large and medium sized events as primary, the spiritual nurture of members is severely reduced. Doing spiritual nurture God’s way is to mobilize the ministry gifts God has given to every member of the Body through self-multiplying structures that send disciples out two-by-two forming ministry dyads, small nurture groups and ministry teams. Within the context of these structures gifted leaders are being trained by hands-on ministry experience and mentoring relationships. This ministry strategy also involves utilizing the network of friendships and family relationships in every subculture by meeting in public and from house to house.

The homes of men who are modeling spiritual leadership in managing their households provide the environment for the spiritual nurture of several families who study the Scriptures, pray and fellowship together on a regular basis. Thus, as God adds His elect to the Body of Christ, there are self-multiplying structures producing sufficient numbers of trained leaders to disciple them to maturity within the context of small enough gathering in Christian homes to allow the expression and blessings of all the ministry gifts God has given His Church. This is the biblical example of doing church God’s way. Informed by sound doctrine and shaped by biblical example God’s way results in good fruit to the glory of God.

Finally, mobilizing for the harvest that is “white” requires lifting one’s eyes to see God working in people’s lives preparing them for the gospel. The ministry of reconciliation is in the world not primarily within the facilities and programs of a local church. Worship is for those who know God and are called according to His purpose to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. A local church is a gathering of the Body of Christ for worship and a staging area for resourcing, training and sending workers into the “harvest.”

## A Model for Ministry

### Tabernacle Churches

A tabernacle model for the church is based upon a biblical understanding of the nature of the church. It began with a calling to Abraham with the promise of an inheritance (Heb. 11:8). From Abraham came many descendants, “children of the promise,” who looked for a homeland ultimately not of this world in its fallen state, but for “...a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” If they had been looking for a homeland here they had opportunity to return to the land, which only foreshadowed the permanent home. Rather they looked for the one who would take them to a better home that God has prepared for the heirs of the promise (Heb. 11:14-16; Jn. 14:2; Rev. 21:1-7). The promise to Abraham’s offspring was to Christ and those who are in Christ by faith. Those who share the faith of Abraham trust not in an earthly inheritance but a better homeland. They view themselves as “strangers and exiles on the earth” who have a heavenly hope (Heb. 11:13;). Their minds are set on that which is above not on the things of earth (Col. 3:1-4). Therefore, having no permanent home in this present age the form of the church is analogous to its nature – Christ. The church is the Body of Christ in the world (I Cor.12:27). Jesus said that his kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36). Rather he came into the world to bear witness to the truth and to save the world as atonement for sin (Jn. 18:37; Jn. 3:17).

God destroyed the Jerusalem temple and replaced it with Christ’s body. His dwelling place is not in structures made with the hands of men. The Body of Christ, the church visible, took a form consistent with its function. It was commanded to go and make disciples of all peoples. It took a form that was effective for it’s mission. It built neither permanent buildings nor large organizations requiring massive resources to maintain. It deployed a tabernacle strategy for ministry and mission in the world. The church was in the world as a peculiar people bearing witness to the truth of the gospel. The form allowed it to move as God’s Spirit led them to those God by grace made receptive to their message. They met in public and from house to house constrained by the Spirit to go where He led (Acts 20:20-22). This flexible form unencumbered by owning and maintaining property resulted in the whole known world hearing the gospel in one generation (Rom. 1:8; 10:18).

Motivation for ministry in a tabernacle church is the result of each member of the Body in right relationship with its head Jesus Christ. Each is inwardly motivated to function properly within an interdependent whole (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:16). Christ as the head of the Body dwells in each member in the person and power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father. The whole Godhead dwelt bodily in Jesus Christ when He walked the earth (Col. 1:19). Now the whole Godhead dwells bodily in the Church in the world. God does not dwell in stationary temples. He dwells in His portable people able to go as He directs to make disciples “...from every tribe and language and people and nation ... “ (Rev. 5:9; Gen. 12:1-3; Matt. 28:18-20). It is the indwelling life of Christ that motivates ministry as each is given a passion and spiritual gift to function properly in relationship to the other Body members and to its head Jesus Christ. Every member is valued; “...God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (I Cor. 12:24-25).

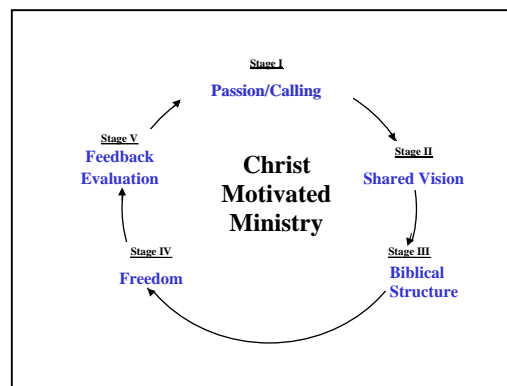
Division within the Body has many causes, but this verse reveals that God gives greater honor to the less honored members so that there may be no division. Humanly the members with the speaking gifts are more honored and those with the behind the scenes helping gifts receive less honor, but not from God. Although this verse is implying that these members should receive more honor within the church to avoid divisions, it is also telling us that God motivates the less honored members. God gives them His praise and values their

contribution. They are inwardly motivated to minister as He has called and gifted them. This is important for the tabernacle church because typically these churches receive “less honor” from the larger “full service” churches which offer a variety of programs, great resources and status. The larger churches are seen as doing mighty works in the name of Jesus and are the role models smaller churches are expected to strive to become. Pastors of these smaller congregations receive “less honor” at large church conferences and training seminars where pastors of smaller congregations flock to learn how to build big churches. Yet more persons are added to the kingdom through the ministry of smaller congregations who serve as “feeder” churches for the larger churches.<sup>181</sup> This is why tabernacle churches must be inwardly Christ motivated rather than outwardly “success” motivated as so often is the case in large “successful” churches. Humanly people want to be a part of a “successful” enterprise. Their personal status is believed to be increased by being members of the flagship churches everyone looks up to and learns from. Smaller churches likewise suffer from inferiority complexes because they cannot offer the programs people have come to expect. The exception is the new church plant that people want to be part of until the excitement wears off and growth plateaus.

A better set of expectations is taught in Scripture. The larger church in Jerusalem encouraged and legitimized the front-line churches that met in homes and were called to take the gospel to the gentile nations. They authorized a form for the church that was able to move among the gentiles without the Jewish cultural and doctrinal expectations (Acts 15:1-20). The inward work of Christ’s Spirit, viewed as in accord with Scripture, set the expectations for how the church should function among the gentiles as it took the gospel to the ends of the earth. The larger Jerusalem Body legitimized the scattered church in the world. Today the large mega-churches can function to legitimize tabernacle churches without raising expectations that they become mega-churches. Both represent a form of the church that is uniquely able to accomplish God’s purpose. The tabernacle church is portable requiring fewer resources while the mega-church is regional entrusted with great resources. Both are needed and blessed by God.

A Christ given passion motivates ministry in tabernacle churches. Members are rewarded by the continual joy of lives blessed by God. Christ motivated ministry has the following elements:

- A Christ motivated passion to serve (calling)
- A shared biblical vision of lives blessed by God
- A biblical structure that supports the envisioned outcome
- A freedom to act as God leads those delivering the ministry
- A system that provides relevant feedback & evaluation/correction



<sup>181</sup> George, Carl F., *Prepare Your Church For The Future* (Revell, 1991) pp. 31-34.

**A Christ Motivated Passion To Serve (calling)**

Christ is the head of the church motivating, gifting and empowering its members. A sound church produces healthy fruit, i.e. members with faith that is bold to live the truth in their ministry calling in the world and in the church each being built up by the Body of Christ. To be effective the form the church takes must provide reasonable parameters while allowing maximum empowering of those doing the work of the ministry in their respective callings. Creativity, innovation and the freedom to make mistakes and learn from them, characterize the ministry delivery teams. Direction from the top down is minimized. Each member's ministry calling drives Christ motivated churches. Church leaders guide and encourage members who are Christ motivated. They have an internally driven passion for ministry. Elders (Christ's under-shepherds) teach, pray for and resource members of the Body of Christ as God has deployed each and gifted each for his or her ministry calling, which is primarily in the world. Church leaders respect the calling God has given to the members of Christ's Body. They view the gathered church's ministry as edifying its members through biblical worship and teaching members to obey all Christ has commanded as each fulfills his or her ministry calling in the world. Thus, the world never sets the agenda for the church. Rather those whose faith is strengthened through receiving of God's grace through corporate worship, prayer and the truth of Scripture are emboldened to live in the world as salt and light. The front line in the spiritual battle for truth is in the world fought by ordinary people with extraordinary power to destroy strongholds of the enemy. The strategy taught by Jesus is to equip and send. The church gathered is a staging area for edifying Christians. It gathers for worship to receive God's grace through Word and sacrament. It is a Christian gathering that exists for edifying the faith of Christians. The outsider who attends is convicted of his sin and called to account by those gathered in spirit and truth. The outsider needs to feel as an outsider for this to happen. He encounters the whole counsel of Scripture without a "user friendly" apology; thus "...the secrets of his heart are exposed." (I Cor. 14:24-25).

**Shared Vision**

A shared vision for the outcome of the church's ministry comes from Christ. For the joy set before him he endured the cross (Heb. 12:2; Rev. 7:9-10). We are part of the "cloud of witnesses" that run the race set before us with endurance and perseverance by the grace of God. We are privileged to participate in the exaltation of Christ. Our shared vision is heavenly – the exaltation of Jesus Christ in the fulfillment of God's plan to unite all things in heaven and earth in Him (Eph. 1:10). Our vision is that of Stephen's "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-56)." We await our "blessed hope" the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ to transform us into His likeness and take us to that which He has prepared for us - a better homeland (Titus 2:13). Our vision is ultimately not of this world. In this world we desire only to be found faithful over Christ's household in giving the "food at the proper time" at the Lord's coming (Matt. 24:44-46). Those charged with the responsibility to oversee the Lord's household serve by Word and sacrament to feed His sheep (Jn. 21:15-17). The vision for the ministry of the church is healthy well fed sheep able to give a clear reason for the hope that is in them as they serve in the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

This shared hope and vision shapes our ministry together. Like a gravitational pull it sets our minds on the fulfilled promise to be like Him and with Him eternally (I Jn. 3:2). Thus, we do not make this our permanent home nor do we seek to build the kingdom of Christ on earth. Does this make us of no earthly good because we are heavenly minded? Scripture says no. We are called to good works that we should walk in them in the world. The church is the Body of Christ deployed in the world as God has gifted and called each into a service to others. The greatest service is to proclaim the truth that God is the creator of the heavens and earth and He has set a day in which He will judge the world by one He has raised from the dead even Jesus Christ. Also, that

God is a self-revelatory God who has not left us without a special knowledge (Scripture) of His plan for His creation. And, that there is a source of truth that can be known in the person of Jesus Christ, for “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For, by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:15-16).

#### **A Biblical Structure That Supports the Envisioned Outcome**

This shared biblical vision informs the temporal ministry vision guiding how the church functions in the world. Scripture provides an organic model in which Christ is the head and members are interdependently related (Rom. 12; I Cor. 12; Eph. 4). When each part is functioning properly the church grows up into its head spiritually to the maturity of Christ and increases in size as God adds to its number those who are being saved. God has given elders and deacons to serve the Body in its proper functioning. Elders are given a ministry of Word and intercession and the authority to rule well. Members are expected to submit to their leaders. All function under the authority of Scripture. A healthy congregation exists where the Word is correctly taught, the sacraments are administered biblically and church discipline is appropriately discharged. Elders who teach and rule well are accorded double honor (I Tim 5:17). Jesus prayed that the church would become perfectly one that the world will know that the Father has sent Him. And, when members of His Body demonstrate love for one another (Jn. 13:35; 17:23). The shared temporal vision set before the church envisions a congregation that demonstrates unity and love for one another, worships God, and sends its members into the world to love it in Christ’s name demonstrated by serving in their various vocational callings.

Biblical structure insures sound doctrine, oversight and resourcing. Elders insure sound doctrine, biblical worship and church discipline. The structure is simple: The Church gathers for worship and scatters for ministry in the world. Parents catechize their children, wives learn from their husbands, mature women train younger women, deacons serve the needs of the Body and the poor in the community, and elders govern and pray. Facilities are minimal: A place to gather for worship and fellowship (a rented hall is preferred; a tabernacle rather than a temple), and member’s homes are used for everything else. Staffing is minimal: Pastor/ Teachers are bi-vocational until the congregation reaches approximately 150 (preferably two bi-vocational pastors start a church as modeled in the NT). There is no need for specialized staff, e.g. for children, youth, women, men, singles, seniors, evangelism, missions, discipleship and counseling to name a few. Less financial overhead results in better stewardship of God’s resources making possible the multiplication of congregations. When a congregation approaches 300 a new church plant is birthed.<sup>182</sup> Mega-churches that amass large amounts of resources in one location are the exception. They function as regional resourcing centers serving “tabernacle” churches that are portable and can go where the “fields are ripe for harvest.” This is by design not default, thus mega-churches serve not as role models for “successful” churches, but rather as a form of ministry that serves and legitimizes “tabernacle” churches. Both contribute to the producing of “good fruit” as form serves function in the evangelization of all peoples.

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<sup>182</sup> Martin, Randy, *Ministry Vision Ideas for Covenant Presbyterian Church*, Feb. 21, 2004.

### Freedom

Within the parameters of a biblical structure suggested above, maximum freedom is given for the form of ministry on the front-line to be shaped by each member's calling and giftedness. For instance, some member's homes will be centers for teaching and resourcing as was Lydia's in the first century church. Missionaries will be cared for on home leave and regularly prayed for (Acts 16:14-15). Moreover, some member's homes will model Christian family life as parents catechize their children and wives are submissive to their husbands and teach other women these things. Other homes will be a place of hospitality to unbelievers God is drawing to Himself. Several families may serve together in a community project of ministry to the world. There is freedom to be led by God's Spirit as He provides opportunities for service without unnecessary organizational hindrances to ministry. Those delivering the ministry that directly touches lives make most ministry decisions that affect their ministry calling. This frees the elders to devote themselves "...to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4)." Those who Christ motivates also bear most of the cost of their ministry. Deacons and elders resource them as needed as they fulfill their ministry calling. Moreover, new opportunities for ministry can be exploited without overburdening current structures as God calls His people into ministry. This allows for healthy growth as Christ motivates and provides the incentive and resources.

Freedom is also exercised in the form of the corporate worship service. The form can reflect the culture where God has placed the tabernacle church and is drawing its members as God adds to its numbers.

However, the Westminster Confession of Faith warns that God has instituted a biblical way of worshipping the true God. Scripture regulates appropriate worship forms:

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.<sup>183</sup>

Thus, Christ also motivates biblical worship. The worship of God is the task of highest priority for Christians (the church evangelizes to gathers disciples to worship God in spirit and truth for eternity). God has revealed how He desires to be worshipped. This belief has been a foundational doctrine for centuries but today it sounds like a radical idea. Jesus said, "...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him (Jn. 4:23). The church at worship is the gathering of those over whose lives Christ reigns. The gospel is the heart of this worship as it proclaims and praises God for who Jesus is and what He has done to reconcile God's elect to himself. The church never goes beyond the gospel it only goes deeper. Those that God's Spirit draws and regenerates at the hearing of the gospel "fit in" because they have passed from death to life. Their greatest "felt need" is a fellowship of authentic worshipers who demonstrate that God is in their midst, a fellowship of those "set apart" from the world. True seekers drawn by God are escaping the "world" they are not looking for a church like the "world."

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<sup>183</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, Together With The Larger and The Shorter Catechism, 3rd Edition (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education & Publication PCA Bookstore, 1990), XXI/i.

### **Feedback & Evaluation**

Church leaders in order to ascertain special prayer needs and provide appropriate oversight, gather ministry data, compile regular reports and then debrief with members. This allows sharing with the larger congregation how God is blessing the ministry of the Body as a whole and provides opportunities to pray and share resources in support of fruit bearing ministries. It also provides opportunities to prune ministries and to make corrections that allow greater fruit bearing. Thus, positive accountability and resourcing is maintained. Using biblical criterions to measure the health of the Body assures that God's plan is being implemented and managed well (Ex. 26:30; Is. 30:1; Eph. 4:1-16; I Cor. 12; Rom. 12, I Tim. 3:4-5).

Feedback is collected informally through regular conversations with members and appropriate observations of their ministry. More formal feedback is collected and evaluated by periodic surveys that are completed by members and compiled to reveal trends. Overall ministry strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are presented for evaluation and planning. Strategies to build on strengths, correct weaknesses, exploit opportunities and avoid threats are developed by church leaders. The corporate health of the congregation is monitored and feedback is provided to members. This communication serves as an encouragement to members as they see how God is blessing the Body and the fruit of their shared ministry results in changed lives to the glory of God. Moreover, it serves to alert members to corporate needs and threats to the health of the Body. This allows for correction and discipline as appropriate. More importantly it allows church leaders to do well what only they can do and allows the greatest freedom for members to do what God has gifted and called them to do.

### **Conclusion**

To implement a tabernacle model would require changing the expectations for doing church in the minds of those who plant a church using this model and those who would begin attending. They would need to be convinced that it is God's way of doing church and thus would bear good fruit in the lives of members. Especially, since the programmatic model attracts families who want programs for their children, they would have to be convinced that it is God's will that they be equipped to provide Christian education for their own children. The tabernacle church must have a competent system for the training of parents.

In addition, members must believe in a "regulative principle" for worship as well as training children. The expectations for a "hot platform" that entertains must be replaced with biblical worship that gives forth God's grace through Word and Sacrament and truly builds the member's faith in God. The church must become the "pillar of the truth" that alone has the power to build mature faith. The focus of the worship service is God and is conducted for Christians not "seekers." True seekers drawn by God are looking for Him through Jesus Christ and those who know Him.

Moreover, the expectations for owning facilities and putting down roots in one location must be changed. The biblical command to go and make disciples where the "fields are white" must be a higher value than prestigious facilities. And, member's homes must be utilized for ministry as a cost effective and better environment for ministry than building classrooms.

And, finally the member's understanding of what constitutes ministry must be defined biblically. Members must be equipped to perform ministry in the world not just within the Body of Christ. One's vocation is God's calling to ministry in the world as well as other opportunities to serve and witness to the gospel in the community. Christian business owners and employees need training to make this paradigm switch.

## About The Author

### Robert L. Brady, D. Min.

Robert served as a member of the Los Angeles City Fire Department from 1961-1986. As an officer he learned valuable hands-on management skills. He also served as a Fire Department Chaplain to approximately 3000 members and their families performing funeral services, weddings, hospital visitations and counseling. He was privileged to help start Bible studies in fire stations that resulted in hundreds of firefighters becoming Christians. He saw God produce a "people movement" that spread to other Fire Departments and become a worldwide fellowship known as *International Firefighters For Christ*.

Robert completed two years of professional consultant training through the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth, and completed a *Doctor of Ministry in Theology* at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. He was mentored in church consulting by Carl F. George, Director of the Charles Fuller Institute, and served as a Field Consultant with the Fuller Institute for twelve years. In 1995 he started Lyle Associates, a church ministry serving the building up of the church until all reach the maturity of Christ.

Robert specializes in assisting churches with a ministry assessment, strategic planning, leadership training, and volunteer mobilization. He has served hundreds of churches throughout the U.S. and Canada for over twenty years. Robert believes the purpose of his ministry is helping congregations to worship biblically, to mobilize every member's spiritual gift for the edification of the Body and to complete the evangelization of "all peoples." He believes in the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture and holds an evangelical reformed theological position. Robert resides in Bakersfield, California with his wife of 47 years. They have two sons and two grandsons who live in the Bakersfield area.

#### Published and Unpublished Writings

Among his writings are the following: *Where Paradigms Clash: Understanding Change*, The Pastor's Update, June 1992; *Mistakes to Avoid When a Pastor Falls*, Ministry Advantage, Mar./ Apr. 1993; *A Radical Approach to World Evangelism*, Ministry Advantage, Sept./ Oct. 1994; *A Consultant's Perspective*, Ministry Advantage, July/ Aug. 1996; *The Treasurer Who Wants to Control*, Leadership: A Practical Journal for Church Leaders, Winter 1998; *Kingdom Interventionists, Volume One: Helping to Put in Order a Church's Ministry*, Lyle Associates, 1998; *Kingdom Interventionists, Volume Two: Conducting a Ministry Audit*, Lyle Associates, 2000; *Kingdom Interventionists, Volume Three: Mobilizing for a Kingdom Harvest*, Lyle Associates, 2002; *Dispensational Meltdown*, Lyle Associates, 2005; *Jewish Myths: A Refutation of Dispensationalism*, Lyle Associates, 2005; *Confessions of a Church Growth Consultant*, Lyle Associates, 2007.



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