

Church Planting Institute
The Church Of The Future



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THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

**“The church of the future
is irreversibly tied to its historic origins yet
inevitably bound to the everlasting future.
Therefore, it must always be
effectively relevant to its time.”**

As we stand at the entrance to the 21st Century, facing huge issues of future uncertainty, there is one question that supersedes all others for we Christians, “What should be the characteristics and activities of the church of the future?”

What should it look like?

What should it sound like?

What should it be doing?

How will it differ from the church of today?

What changes must happen to make the church God’s instrument for the prophetic future?

If we can find this answer and fulfil it, God will take care of the rest, as far as we are concerned. If we can truly be His prophetic people to our day and if we can serve Him as He specifically desires in this crucial time, this is all we are required to do. His sovereign purposes will undertake the remainder.

The church of the future will be a contemporary version of the New Testament Church. It will emulate it in everything, including contemporary relevance to God’s current purposes.

OUR MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION

Amongst all the potential uncertainties of the future there is really only one issue with which we Christians **MUST** be concerned and that relates to the church. What is God’s desire and expectation concerning His church in the near future? What has He purposed that it should achieve? What is the specific role He intends it to play? Are

we, His people, in a position to fulfil God's purpose? If not, are we willing to change whatever needs changing in order to enable us to truly be His prophetic people and to accomplish His plans?

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR HISTORIC PAST

The Church is eternally linked to its history because, within that history lies the death and resurrection of its founder, the pivotal fulcrum of its existence. Without the redemptive power of Christ's atonement the church is nothing. Apart from Christ's redemption, it is just an elaborate social club.

The everlasting purpose of the church is inextricably tied to the great redeeming moment when Jesus paid salvation's price for every human being. Without this the church has no story to tell. No message to proclaim. No reason to exist.

However, the church is not only inextricably linked to the past, it is also an integral, indispensable feature of the prophetic future. The imperative requirement for those of us who are part of its present, is to build a strong, safe bridge between those extremities. We do dare not lose the imperatives of our historic past. Neither do we want to forfeit the tremendous blessings of our prophetic future.

In the church around the world today, there is an explosive vision and desire to plant new churches. Thousands of pastors are eager to be involved and to see their churches reproduce. However, an urgent question arises, "What kind of churches should we be planting?"

How deeply does the fact that we are now entering a new millennium, the 21st Century, affect the kind of churches we should be planting? Is this an important factor to consider? How much should it influence our thinking and planning?

There is only one truly authentic source to which we should address such questions, - the Bible! We dare not pattern it on humanistic concepts. We should not try to clone it from any part of church history, except the part that is recorded in the New Testament. The Acts of Apostles, is the only authoritative pattern for church design. Here we have, not only a Divinely authenticated history but a prophetic blueprint for all ages.

I believe that God is endeavouring to bring His Church today into new dimensions of prophetic fulfilment. A New day is dawning in God's prophetic purpose in which His church is to be a crucial instrument. May we fully understand the implications and BE that church. May we also help to reproduce that glorious church all over our world.

Gerald Rowlands

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Chapter One

The Early Church Model

The Biblical account of the early church begins in the Acts of Apostles. It then continues throughout the Epistles as we catch glimpses of its various activities and the life of the early believers. However, the account in the Acts of Apostles is the most direct and concentrated. The entire book is a somewhat simple diary of the ministry of the Apostles and the early churches.

However, it is more than a history of the earlier years of the church. It is also a blueprint for the church throughout the ages. It is a model or paradigm of what God desired and intended His church to be in the world. As we read the book of Acts we do not merely see an historical account, we see a prophetic picture of what the church will be once again before the return of Christ to reign over the earth.

LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THE FEATURES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

1. THE CRUCIAL INITIATING FACTOR WAS THE HOLY SPIRIT

“and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” (Acts 2:2).

“And they (the disciples) were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:4).

These verses describe the initiation of the New Testament church. The Bible word for “spirit” including the Holy Spirit, is “air, wind, spirit”. (In Hebrew it is ruach, in Greek, pneuma.)

The sound of the mighty rushing wind from heaven was the noise created by the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the redeemed community, to establish them as the Church of the Living God.

The Holy Spirit is the essential, indispensable breath and life of the church without which it is a lifeless form and NOT a true Church!

On the Day of Pentecost, God breathed His Spirit into the church and it became the LIFE of the church.

A prophetic prediction of this is seen in the “lifing” of Adam.

“And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7)

Before God breathed into him, Adam was a lifeless form, created from the dust. After God breathed into him he came alive. So with the church. Before Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were spiritually lifeless. He had commanded them to “wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father.” (Lk 24:49).

Jesus also “breathed upon His disciples and said receive the Holy Ghost.” (John 20:22)

N.B. His breath “inducted into them” the Holy Ghost. This was a prophetic picture of what would happen in Jerusalem when they received the promise of the Father.

The Holy Spirit was the initiator of the church. Before His coming, the believers were not truly the church. After His arrival they became the church. He was the “first cause.” He is therefore an indispensable factor in the church. Without His continuing presence as Lord, (2 Cor 3:17,18) a church is not a church.

Without the Holy Spirit, the church is a lifeless form, for His presence is actually the breath and life of it. Sadly, many professing Christians and their churches today, are just that. Lifeless forms. They are like the people of whom Timothy spoke,

2 Tim 3:5. “having a form, (appearance, resemblance, likeness) of Godliness, but denying (disapproving, rejecting) the power (life, force, energy) thereof.”

Many churches today operate by programs, personalities and astute administration. instead of the power of the Spirit. However, as the Bible says of individual Christians, “*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.*” (Rom 8:9)

So it must be said of any church, “If a (so-called) church, does not have the Spirit of God, it does not belong to Him.”

The presence and power of the Spirit may be expressed in many ways. He is a person of great varieties. 1 Cor 12:4-7. His presence within a church may therefore be evidenced in many different ways. We ought not to narrow or restrict His manifestations as long as they are Biblically legitimate.

Too many modern pastors are like the “foolish Galatians” (Gal 3:3) believing that something birthed by the Spirit can be continued and perfected in the flesh.

The Blessed Holy Spirit, who initiated the church, is *absolutely indispensable* to its continuance.

Every local church must realise and acknowledge that unless the Holy Spirit is given proper place and authority within it, that church can never grow up into the full purposes of God. The changes, indispensable to growth, can never occur unless the Holy Spirit is acknowledged as Lord.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is (Lord) there is liberty. But we all, with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (2 Cor 3:17,18).

Several times in Acts, the disciples were said to be “filled” (Gk. pletho; filled to a point of overflowing) with the Holy Ghost. We are not completely filled unless we are overflowing. It is this overflow of the Spirit that energises ministry. When we minister “in the power of the Spirit” it is the overflow of the anointing by which we minister. Jesus said (John 7:37) that “rivers of living water would FLOW OUT from our bellies. (the area in which The Spirit resides, within our spirit) Preachers should always ensure they are filled with and anointed by the Holy Spirit to the point of overflow.

Without the LIFE of The Spirit, a church is simply a lifeless corpse.

The following inscription was found on the grave of a preacher in New England.

“Go tell the church that I am dead
But they should shed no tears.
For though I am dead, I am no more dead
Than they have been for years!”

The leadership of every church needs to ask itself honestly :-

1. Is the Holy Spirit truly present in our church, its programs and activities?
2. Is He truly Lord of all that is transpiring?
3. Does His life infuse and energise all its activities?
4. Are we truly more dependent on Him than anything or anyone else?
5. How may we truly know that He is Lord of our local church?
6. What can we do to ensure that He is truly Lord?

If the answers are not a resounding, unequivocal YES! We need to do some serious searching and repenting. If any power other than the Holy Spirit is the energising factor in the church, we need a change of attitude and direction.

1. THE CHURCH WAS BIRTHED IN A PRAYER MEETING, NOT A BOARD MEETING

“They all continued with one accord in fervent prayer.” (Acts 1:14a).

ALL the disciples were involved.
They CONTINUED (kept at it consistently) in prayer.
They were of ONE ACCORD. Acts 2:1; 4:32.
Their prayers were FERVENT. (earnest, fiery, passionate, glowing)

Earnest, fervent prayer is the finest way in which to declare our absolute dependence on God. Every time we stop to pray, we virtually say, “Lord, we need you, we are dependant on you, we can do nothing without you!” It is this acknowledgement, made in humility that keeps us meek enough for God to meet us and answer our prayers.

Following Christ’s ascension, the 120 disciples continued daily in prayer until the Feast of Pentecost. Their unity, expressed as one accord, was their united focus on seeking God and waiting for the promise of the Father, as predicted by Jesus. The room in which they gathered became saturated in prayer. It was to this atmosphere that the Holy Spirit was drawn. First He filled all the room. Then He filled all the disciples.

Fervent, genuine, honest, united prayer will always attract the Holy Spirit, particularly if we are actually praying for a visitation of the Spirit. The pathway to a fresh move of the Spirit begins not in the Board room, but in the prayer room.

Prayer for revival almost always precedes revival. It is very rare that the Holy Spirit is poured out on a people who are not seeking God in prayer with desperate prayer for a fresh move of God’s Spirit. We should always be praying, with David the psalmist :-

*“Oh, revive us! Then your people can rejoice in you again.
Pour out your love and kindness on us, Lord, and grant us your salvation.”*
Psalms 85:6,7 (Living)

Whilst the planning and strategising that typifies a Board meeting is good and necessary it can never take priority over prayer. The spiritual growth of a church and the planting of new

churches must always be born in and saturated with prayer. Fervent prayer is an absolutely indispensable feature of spiritual life and growth.

3. THE COMPANY WAS MALE AND FEMALE IN GENDER

“With the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.” (Acts 1:14b)

In respect of the End Time outpouring, Joel specifically refers to “God’s sons **and** daughters, His servants **and** handmaidens. Joel 2:28,29. Acts 2:17-21.

God obviously has a very specific place for women in His plan for the End Time harvest. The women were there in the upper room when the Spirit descended. They were amongst those who were filled with the Spirit. They were an integral part of the corporate company of those became the universal church. As we have travelled around the world in recent years, we have been constantly impressed with the role that God has given to women, His handmaids, in this great visitation and harvest. As God fulfils His Word and pours out the Former and the Latter Rain, both men **and** women are essential to the harvest of the Ages.

The type of male chauvinism that dominates much religious thinking is not scriptural. The kind of pride that accompanies it is injurious to and a hindrance to spiritual health, growth and progress.

*“For, in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither is there slave nor free, there is **neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**” (Gal 3:28).*

4. THE CHURCH WAS PEOPLE, NOT “BUILDING ORIENTED.”

The early, New Testament church is symbolised by crowds of people, not by religious buildings or sites. Jesus had predicted :-

*“The hour is coming, and has already arrived, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
God is Spirit and those who worship Him (anywhere and everywhere) must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23,24).*

He also clearly foretold that in that hour (times) they would no longer go to a particular mountain (religious site) nor to Jerusalem, (the Temple) but they would worship in spirit wherever they happened to be. For the church is people, not buildings or “sacred” places.

The church today, in much of the world, has become very building oriented. Many people even believe that “church” = religious building. But the early church did not possess any buildings. Neither did their activities revolve around such.

The Early church was clearly :-

- a) Christ centred. Matt 18:20.
- b) People oriented. Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15.

Their public activities were evangelistic efforts to reach non-believers. Even the Temple had become a venue for evangelism for the new message concerning Jesus, His death and resurrection. Their houses became the venues in which they fellowshiped and discipled the new believers in small groups.

During the reign of Emperor Constantine, in the fourth Century, Christianity was made the established religion of his empire.

Under Constantine's authority, numerous pagan temples were appropriated for church use.

This was the beginning of the church's obsession with buildings that later became known as "churches." State funds were also used to erect huge, ornate buildings and to support the ecclesiastical hierarchy. At this time, the church began to become building and clergy oriented but this was more due to the influence of Constantine than the instigation of the Holy Spirit.

God never intended the church to become so building bound . The true church is NOT a building. It is a redeemed people. It was never intended that its activities should be hidden behind "Sanctuary" walls. Christ died in a public place and God intended His death to be proclaimed in public places to the general population. The Gospel can only be said to be truly preached when it is proclaimed to the non-converted.

The early church functioned largely in the "market place." Out where the people were. Confronting the public with the life and message of Jesus in a positive, altruistic manner.

5. A MULTI- MEMBER MINISTRY TEAM

*"But Peter, standing up **together with the eleven**, raised his voice and said to them, Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to my words." (Acts 2:14).*

The record is quite specific and the inference is clear. Peter was not a "one man band". He was part of a ministry team. When he stood to preach, the whole team stood with him clearly signifying that this was not simply Peter's view, it was the conviction of all the Apostles. They were an Apostolic team comprised of several different ministries and a variety of skills. God did not intend that Christianity be presented via a one man ministry for whom all the believers were to be an inactive audience.

The church is represented as a body, consisting of many members, all varying in purpose yet all essential to the effectiveness of that body.

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body, being many, are one body, so is Christ." (1 Cor 12:12.)

No member of that body can say "I have no need of you." (1 Cor 12:12-31).

Every member of Christ's Body (The church) has a specific role and part to play. This is particularly true in respect of the healthy growth and development of the Body. Eph 4:16.

The modern style of church ministry is largely "clergy dominated." Frequently one person, named "the minister", assumes all responsibility for leadership. But this is not a biblical pattern. The original intention was for teams of ministries to work together and for whole congregations to become ministering bodies. The early Apostles functioned in "Apostolic bands" - teams of ministers working together.

6. ANOINTED, PROPHETIC AND INSPIRATIONAL PREACHING

The effective dynamic of Peter's message may be assessed by the obvious, powerful impact it had on his listeners. Before he had opportunity to conclude his message the audience came under heavy conviction. They cried out to each other, "What shall we do?" Peter's sensitivity to the Spirit and to the situation the Spirit had created enabled him to bring the meeting to a profitable conclusion. Three thousand souls were saved in one meeting.

A genuine, anointed message will always move people to action!

Consider some of the factors in the situation.

Peter was freshly anointed, filled with the Holy Spirit and the power of God. Prior to this moment, he had actually denied Jesus three times. He was obviously reticent to acknowledge his relationship to Christ. Now, filled with the Spirit, he boldly confronts a multitude with the Gospel and the claims of Christ. The Holy Spirit transformed and empowered him, filling him with boldness and authority.

He “raised his voice” and boldly addressed the crowd. His preaching was obviously with great unction. He addressed the crowd in a challenging manner, clearly revealing exactly where they stood.

He preached straight from the Scriptures, using them as the foundation of his message. The content of his sermon was strongly biblical. His approach was straight to the point, confrontational and challenging.

The message had a prophetic content, revealing the implications of the words spoken by the prophets of God. He clearly established a rapport with his listeners that enabled him to persuade and convince them. His message, preached in the power of the Spirit, brought powerful conviction to the hearts of his audience. He included clear instructions with regard to repentance. Repentance was the first word of the Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus. It is still undoubtedly the most important, indispensable word of an effective Gospel presentation.

Without true repentance no real foundation can be laid. He concluded with a clear and powerful appeal to which the crowd responded positively. The respondents were followed up and properly cared for. They were integrated into a regular fellowship of house groups in which they received sound biblical teaching.

Indications:

Preachers should always prepare with adequate prayer.

They should always depend on the anointing of the Spirit more than anything else.

They should speak forcefully and boldly in the Spirit.

They must address people clearly and simply.

Always give opportunity for people to make a response.

Peter presented a message containing plenty of solid, scriptural content but he obviously delivered it under a powerful anointing of the Spirit upon whom he clearly depended. Paul too, though obviously an intellectual, well educated person, clearly confessed his dependence on the power of the Spirit.

“And my speech and my preaching with not with persuasive words of men’s wisdom, (intellectual argument) but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (1 Cor 2:4.)

7. CONVERSIONAL OBEDIENCE

“What shall be the end of those who do not OBEY the Gospel of God?” (1 Pet 4:17).

Genuine repentance is the first essential step in a process of salvation for the individual. The second step is complete obedience to God and His Word. The Gospel is not only to be believed it is to be absolutely obeyed. This process is known as “conversional obedience,” a process, achieved over time, by which one is brought into alignment with the perfect Will of God for one’s life and service.

Personal salvation may begin at a precise and specific moment but the whole work of personal redemption is not wholly achieved at that moment. It usually requires persevering

faith and total commitment to God to ultimately live the life that God desires. It may realistically be said that salvation is a process, initiated and continued by God.

“For it is God who works within you, both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” (Phil 3:13).

“He that has begun a good work in you, will complete it until the Day of Christ.” (Phil 1:6).

A person is “saved” the moment they repent and believe the Gospel but the full impact of that salvation is yet to be worked out in them. The process of being transformed into the image of Christ has commenced but it is as we continually and consistently submit to His dealings and purposes in our lives that the process of full salvation is achieved. Obedience and submission are the keys to seeing God’s purposes fulfilled.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who works in you both to will and to do (start and conclude) His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:12,13).

8. REAL LIFE TRANSFORMATIONS

“Repent, be baptised (in water) for the remission of your sins, and receive the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38)

The basic, foundational instruction that Peter gave was three fold.

- a) REPENT. Turn around. Change your thinking towards and about God.
- b) BE BAPTISED. Bury your old life. Be done with it. Forget it!
- c) RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. Get your brand new life from God. Be a new creation.

True Christians are NEW CREATIONS

“If anyone be in Christ Jesus, they are a brand new creature. Old things pass away and behold all things become new.”

(2 Cor 5:17.)

One of the true indications of a real visitation of the Spirit is the transformation of lives by the grace and power of God. Many lives in Jerusalem at that time were powerfully transformed, including those of the Apostles themselves. Peter was certainly powerfully changed. At a somewhat later date, Paul too became a symbol of a life radically transformed by the power of the risen Christ. His conversion would become a prophetic indication of the millions of lives that would later be changed and recreated by the Gospel.

When the message was later taken to the nations, it would bring freedom, redemption and transformation to all who believed and embraced it. When the Gospel is proclaimed, in the power of the Spirit, it will invariably bring people into God’s Kingdom. Even to this day, the Gospel’s trail has been followed by millions of people, from all nations and races, whose lives have been amazingly transformed.

9. HUNGER FOR GOD AND HIS WORD. ACTS 2:41.

An important feature of a new creature is an insatiable hunger after God. To know Him, be with Him, learn from Him and grow into His likeness. The redeemed person yearns for and hungers after God, His presence and His fellowship. Man was originally created with a heart for God.

Through the fall mankind was disconnected and separated from God but redemption restores his proximity and relationship.

A further product of personal salvation is a hunger to hear God's voice, including a strong desire for His Word. One obvious way to satisfy this is by reading and hearing God's Words through the Bible. However, we must do more than merely read or even study them. Intellectual study of the Bible is not a substitute for a personal meeting with God. We must "eat and devour" His words. In so doing the Word literally becomes part of us. It is not merely intellectual, head knowledge. Its wisdom and power actually become part of our life force.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord." (Matt 4:4).

It is God's Word within us, quickened by the Holy Spirit that increases our capacity and desire for God. The Bible is not God. It is a stepping stone by which we may reach God. Simply reading the Bible is not sufficient, we must meet consistently with the author of the book.

The new believers continued steadfastly each day in the Word of God. Their hunger had been kindled by their new relationship to God through faith in the Messiah Jesus.

10. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

One of the important things we should recognise and remember about the Early church is that it was contemporary, "up to date" with its times. Contemporary means, "co-existing harmoniously with its times." To be contemporary is to be abreast of and equal to the current times. Therefore, to be a New Testament church in the 21st Century is to be a church that relates properly to the 21st Century.

Too many churches have the idea that to be a New Testament (type) church we must be ancient and old fashioned. They believe that the old is more sacred than the new. They cling to the culture of past generations, presuming that the old days were more holy and that old fashioned life styles are more spiritual than are contemporary ones. This may be true to some degree in that our modern world has largely forsaken the righteous standards of God. But it does NOT mean that we must cling on to the old fashioned culture of bygone generations because the people of those days were more moral and righteous.

It is abundantly possible to please God and truly walk in harmony with Him, yet be a modern minded, contemporary person.

Many sincere Christians have an subconscious idea that God is an old fashioned, antiquated gentleman who lives in a manner befitting centuries past. They also believe that they too should be quaintly old fashioned in order to be like Him.

Godly persons do not have to be antiquated, old fashioned, and out of date, in order to be righteous and spiritual. Nor do churches. Churches need to be contemporary in their outreach in order to adequately and effectively communicate with their peers and their generation. One of the things that God appreciated about King David was his ability to relate, not only to His God, but to his own generation. God said of David, whom He called, "A man after my own heart"

"He served his (own) generation, according to the Will of God." (Acts 13:36).

David knew God and understood His Will, but he also knew, understood and was thus able to serve, his own generation.

It was also said, of the sons of Issachar,
“They had an understanding (awareness, comprehension) of their times and of what Israel ought to do in the light of those specific times.” (1 Chron 12:32).

When Israel marched as a nation in the purposes of God, Issachar marched just behind Judah, the leading tribe other than Levi. The tribe of Issachar won God’s commendation because they marched in time with God AND with their generation. They marched, towards the head of the national column because they understood the Will of God for their time.

They marched in step with God and they kept pace with their generation.

The church today should have one hand in God’s hand and the other in the hand of their generation. It must be contemporary in its perceptions and in its activities.

11. CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY

Although the crowds in Jerusalem were all Jews, and devout men, (Acts 2:5) they were also said to be “from every nation under heaven.” (i.e. from many parts of the world) They had returned to Jerusalem from every nation to which they had originally been scattered in the Dispersion. Obviously they had now been living in those nations for some time and would undoubtedly have adopted to some degree, various aspects of the culture of the lands in which they now lived. In many ways they were a cosmopolitan crowd, representing numerous cultures, yet the Gospel and the church, appealed to all of them.

Concerning the phrase, “having favour with all the people.” Acts 2:42, one translator renders it, “And the people liked what they saw!” There was something about the early church that appealed to and attracted persons from many varied cultures. Thus we learn that the church should have a multi-cultural appeal. It should not only appeal to one race, culture or people type. The grace of God manifested in and through the church should allow the church to appeal to more than one culture group. God is a God of variety. He created all the races. He redeemed all the races. His Gospel is for all nations. It must therefore be multi-cultural in perception, nature and appeal. The church can be multi-cultural because the Kingdom of God is supra-cultural. It embraces and supersedes all human cultures.

12. SUPRA CULTURAL LIFE STYLE

Although the church should be multi-cultural, it must also be supra-cultural inasmuch as the Kingdom of God confronts and challenges the principles and standards of every other culture. As citizens of God’s Kingdom, we adopt the culture of our new citizenship. We relate to God’s laws and principles above and before the culture of our human ethnicity. Our Kingdom loyalties must be prioritised above and always supersede our ethnic identities. For example, I am not an “Australian Christian”, but rather a “Christian Australian”. My Christian loyalty should supersede national and ethnic identity. I should be more easily recognised as a Christian, than as an Australian.

In Acts 2:40, Peter labelled the world culture as a perverse (crooked) generation and exhorted the new believers to separate (distance) themselves from it. Those who are Christ’s should be delivered from the mind set and ways of the perverse generations of which they were part and join themselves to Christ, His likeness and His Kingdom. As someone has wisely said, “We are in this world, but not OF this world.” As citizens of God’s Kingdom our lifestyles and behaviour should daily demonstrate the reality of His rule and the superiority of His life.

13. DISCIPLESHIP MAKING. ACTS 2:42

“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers.”

This verse describes a process of discipleship making.

The new believers were :-

- a) Repentant
- b) Water baptised.
- c) Spirit filled
- d) Hungry for the Word of life which they “received gladly.”
- e) Associated with the Apostles.
- f) Sought to emulate their life style.
- g) Became partners in the Koinonia. (Fellowship)
- h) Ate covenant meals together.
- i) Prayed together in one accord.
- j) Held all things in common.
- k) Sacrificed to share with needier saints.
- l) Attended daily house gatherings.
- m) Continually Praised God.

14. ENJOYED FAVOUR WITH GOD AND THE LOCAL POPULATION.

This regular, daily routine to which the believers gave themselves, under the guidance and authority of the Apostles, was a formula for reproducing disciples. It was part of the regular practise of the Early church and should be established in every church today. It was one of the reasons why, when the believers were later scattered by persecution, all of them were able to share the Word of God and spread the revival. Acts 8:4. They had all been disciplined, trained, and prepared to share the Gospel wherever they might be.

It was also the reason why men like Phillip and Stephen qualified to become deacons, Acts 6:5, and still later become preachers and evangelists.

Every local church should be a training centre where believers are prepared for works of the ministry.

15. GENUINE RESPECT AND REVERENCE FOR GOD. ACTS 2:43.

“Then fear (of God) came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles.”

Fear is mentioned five times in Acts in connection with the church. In each case the same Greek word “phobos” is used.

On three occasions it is said of the Christians. 2:43; 5:11; 9:31.

On two occasions it refers to the surrounding population. 5:5; 19:17.

From this we may deduce :-

- a) When the church (Christians) truly fear the Lord, their community will begin to fear Him too.
- b) If the church does not have a fear of God, how can we ever expect the surrounding community to fear Him?

- c) It was when the believers “feared the Lord” that MANY signs and wonders were done by the Apostles. Acts 2:43.

The Fear of the Lord is not a popular theme today. It is rarely ever preached on or taught. However is still a very valid and scriptural requirement. It may be precisely because some churches do not have it that many signs and wonders do not occur among them.

The Bible has much to say on this subject, all of it is relevant and required. For the sake of time and space let us just leave one verse:-

“The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. And the Knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” Proverbs 9:10.

If the Fear of the Lord is only the beginning of wisdom, how much true wisdom does a person possess who has no fear of God?

There is a great difference between being afraid of God, and respecting Him.

Exod 20:20

“Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." (NIV)

God had no desire to frighten His people. He did not want them to be afraid of Him but He definitely wanted them to revere and respect him. Fear of God is for our good.

16. COMMUNAL CONCERN AND SHARING. ACTS 2:44, 45.

“Now all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need.”

The new believers quickly developed a benevolent attitude. They no longer considered anything they owned as their own personal, private possession but as belonging to their Lord and His kingdom. They developed a selfless, compassionate and generous attitude towards all other believers.

Many of the members of that early church were not natives of Jerusalem. They had come there for a brief visit to keep the Feast of Pentecost. Most had undoubtedly budgeted for only a short stay. However, once they became involved in the church they remained in Jerusalem to receive as much teaching and grounding as possible. Obviously this created many unexpected financial needs for food and accommodation etc. Their fellow believers quickly rallied to help them with those needs. They liberally shared their homes and goods, distributing to every family as they had need.

Social and economic concern

Their generous liberality did not apply only to those within their local community. They also began to send funds to help in crises such as famines, in various other places. (Acts 11:27-30)

It was partly this benevolent, altruistic economic attitude in the church that caused the people to say, “These men are turning the world upside down.”

The usual attitude of mankind is “every man for himself” but the church cared for the needs of others too. The compassionate concern and economic generosity practised by the early church astounded the world who had never witnessed such love and care for others. Such selflessness, compassion and generosity were without precedent. It was a characteristic that attracted and impressed everyone who saw it.

17. KINGDOM LIFE STYLE

The Greek word, *Koinonia*, that is translated “Fellowship” is also the word for partnership and may be used for either marriage or business partnerships. The example of a marriage partnership is a very succinct one because a true marriage partnership affects every aspect of the whole lives of the partners. Marriage and family life are matters that demand our whole care and attention throughout our lifetime. Marriage is not a past time or a hobby, it is a whole way of life. The true church is both a community and a culture. Christianity is not just something we do on Sundays. The early church functioned daily. It was a seven day a week, full time occupation.

One of the tragedies of modern Christianity, particularly in the West, is that Christianity has often been slotted in to a convenient corner of one’s life. It is almost like a religious hobby rather than an all absorbing life style. This is in complete contrast to many religions, e.g. Islam, Hinduism etc which are not merely religious persuasions but whole ways of life. Consequently converts to Christianity often find it extremely difficult to relate to a Faith that does not totally absorb them into a complete lifestyle. This becomes particularly difficult when a convert is forced out of their former community, renounced by family, friends and associates, and find themselves without a similar community in their new found Faith.

18. COMMUNITY OUTREACHES. ACTS 2:46; 3:1-10

A Church Without Walls

The church did not hide itself away from the world. It did not practise its activities within a “sanctuary” protected from the gaze and awareness of the general population. The disciples regularly went out into the wider community and brought the Good News of Jesus to the poor, dispossessed and needy. Modern church buildings are extremely convenient in many ways but they can tend to isolate Christians from their communities. Many people feel uncomfortable to enter a church building but will enter a place that is more accessible and public. Churches need to arrange more activities in mutually accessible and acceptable venues.

Taking The Middle Ground

There are numerous places that are neutral ground inasmuch as both Christians and non-Christians feel comfortable to frequent them. These constitute a middle ground between Christians and the world of non-believers. The church should take advantage of such places, taking the middle ground for the Kingdom of God. Using neutral venues to meet and befriend people and present Christ in a non threatening and winsome manner.

19. REGULAR HOUSE MEETINGS AND COMMUNAL MEALS

“Breaking bread (sharing hospitality and fellowship) from house to house and eating their food with gladness and sincerity of heart.” (Acts 2:46).

Many of the church’s activities were conducted in house meetings. These locations were spread throughout Jerusalem, penetrating the population areas of the city and radiating the influence of the church more widely. Such smaller gatherings are ideal for the growth of new believers and for attracting many new people. The atmosphere is much less formal than

that of a traditional church. The ethos is usually much friendlier. The average person will feel much more relaxed in such circumstances.

In addition, they were able to develop in their relationships more readily. In the Middle East sharing meals was much more significant than in the West. Meals were a point of social contact and commitment. Inviting someone to your home for a meal constituted an offer of relationship. Certain communal meals were central to making a social covenant with a person or family. Thus, through house meetings and communal meals, the greater body of believers were able to get to know each other better and enter into responsible commitment one with another. In this manner the believers were knit together in mutual respect and trust.

Communal meals were also an important aspect of making and celebrating covenant. The early believers were not only in covenant with God, they were in covenant with each other. The fellowship into which they were joined was a true partnership, (Koinonia) into which every party was accepted by covenant commitment. Through regular communal meals they confirmed and strengthened their mutual loyalty.

20. WIDE SPREAD PUBLIC APPROVAL. ACTS 2:47.

“They worshiped together regularly at the Temple each day, and met in small groups in homes for Communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising God. The whole city was favorable to them, and each day God added to them all who were being saved.”

(Acts 2:47 Living)

The members of the early church, individually and corporately, conducted their lives and affairs in such a manner that non-believers became envious of them. One translator says of Acts 2:47, “The people liked what they saw.” They appreciated and admired the life style of the Christians. The members lived in such a way that their life patterns intrigued and attracted the outsiders and won wide spread approval.

It is a mistake to think that if the church is functioning righteously it will **always** attract opposition. Jesus Himself experienced wide spread approval during much of His ministry. It is recorded, of his earlier years, that an aspect of his growth included “social favour.”

“And Jesus grew in wisdom (mental) and stature, (physical) in favour with God (spiritual) and with man.” (social) (Luke 2:52).

We also read of Jesus that,

“.....and the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

The Greek word used for common, “*polus*” conveys the idea that the people were common because they were more numerous, i.e. in the majority. Thus the scripture could read, “the majority of the people heard Him gladly.”

If Jesus won such approval from the majority of people, and His life, grace and power is evidenced in His redeemed people, then they should also win the approval of many people. Their lives, lived in integrity and compassion, should prove attractive and win people to Christ and His Kingdom.

Non-Christians today may find many faults with the church, but Jesus Himself remains without fault. The unspoken attitude of many today is, “Church? - No! Jesus? - Yes! The more Christ-like a local church becomes, the more likely it is to receive the favour and approval of the local populace.

21. PERSECUTION

It is also true that the church has often known opposition and persecution. This is true through most of its history. Jesus frequently predicted that, “In the world you will have tribulation.” John 16:33. The Bible also says,

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (2 Tim 3:12 KJV)

Much of church history is stained with the blood of martyrs. In fact someone has said that “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Many of God’s finest saints have finally become martyrs for their faith. Nor is this a historic phenomena for this twentieth century has witnessed literally millions of martyrdoms even to this present day. The church of the twentieth Century has suffered more martyrdoms than at any previous part of church history.

The natural mind would tend to think that the prospect of martyrdom would be a huge deterrent to conversion. In fact the opposite has often been true. The greater the pressure and persecution, the greater has been the growth of the church. In those areas of our world where the church has been heavily persecuted including harassment, imprisonment, torture and death, the church has been healthier, more committed and more effective. The church appears to thrive in situations of opposition and persecution.

However, there were also times when the church enjoyed great favour from the local community as in Acts 2:47. This is something the church should pray and believe for. Pray that the local church will be so Christ-like in its attitudes and activities that the surrounding community will “hear them gladly.”

22. POWERFUL PRAISE AND WORSHIP. Acts 2:47

Praise was an outstanding feature of the early church. They were a praising community. Their hearts and voices were constantly filled with the high praises of the Lord.

Praise undoubtedly releases positive energy and power into the atmosphere and ethos of a place. King David actually said that the high praises of the saints “binds kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron.” He also said that high praise is as a two edged sword. (Psa 150:6,8.) There is obviously tremendous power in praise.

But Praise to God is not only spoken words, it is a lifestyle. Our very lives and the manner in which we conduct ourselves should speak volumes of praise to God to the people who observe us day by day. Praise is the way we conduct ourselves in our places of employment. It is the honesty and integrity we display in our every day activities. We bring praise to God when we help our neighbour in their time of trouble.

Much of the praise and worship in which we engage is done behind closed doors, hidden from the view of men. But the early church praised God in the market place, causing by-standers to say that they heard the first disciples “speaking the wonderful works of God” into the ears of the public.

Please understand that congregational praise and worship is extremely valid, precious to God and powerful in its results. It is also an extremely vital part of our love and service to God. Engaging in such worship actually impacts powerfully upon our spiritual enemies. It also releases dynamic spiritual energy to greatly damage the strongholds of Satan.

23. HOLY GHOST PRAYER MEETINGS. ACTS 3:31.

It was in a prayer meeting that the church was birthed. Acts 1:14, and it was in prayer meetings that the blessing and power increased and multiplied. Holy Spirit inspired prayer is essential to the continuing move of God’s Spirit.

“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken: and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31).

It was in such prayer meetings that believers were
Filled (again) with the Holy Spirit.
Received boldness to speak the Word of God.
Saw things shaken by the power of God.

Fervent corporate prayer with one accord, fans the flames of revival and keeps it blazing.
Prayer is to revival as fuel is to a fire. Unless we constantly replenish the fuel the fire will eventually expire. So with a move of God’s Spirit. We should constantly replenish it with fervent, earnest, genuine prayer.

24. DAILY ADDITIONS TO THE CHURCH. ACTS 2:47.

To this remarkable, First Century church, God added daily those who were being saved. If we would wish Him to do the same to our church, we need to fully emulate that church that He established in Jerusalem. We must conduct our church in complete harmony with the pattern of the early church.

We must pray as they did. Acts 1:14; 4:31.

We must live in one accord. Acts 2:1; 4:32.

We must be constantly filled with the Spirit. Acts 4:31.

We must evidence the fruit of Christ’s Spirit. Acts 2:40-47.

We must go public with the proclamation of the Gospel. Acts 2:14.

We must pull in the Gospel net. Acts 2:38,39.

We must care for and disciple the converts. Acts 2:42.

We must be a praising people. Acts 2:47.

24. Multitudes believed. Acts 4:32.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Lord added to the church.(Acts 2:47) More believers were added later. Acts 5:14; 11:24. But a further mathematical factor was introduced when He began to multiply the number of disciples. Acts 6:1,7. This caused an accelerated growth in the churches through which multitudes of believers were added. (Acts 5:14)

The Gospel was meant to reach the multitudes of mankind. It was never intended to be a small, isolated sect hidden behind the walls of some church sanctuary. The early Apostles and their disciples went public. They went to the masses and fearlessly proclaimed a Gospel that was attested by God through mighty signs and (supernatural) miracles.

The early church was not hidden in a corner, it was out on main street, announcing salvation through faith in Jesus to the multitudes and multitudes were convinced, believed and were added to the church. Unfortunately, after some years, the evangelistic fervour and mighty impact began to diminish. At times the voice of the church was almost silenced, yet God retained a witness in the earth. He also predicted a tremendous revival in the Last Days that would occasion a tremendous harvest when once again, great multitudes of believers would be added to the church.

Chapter Two

The Dark Ages

Sadly, the fire and fervour of the early church began to wane and decline during the 3rd Century. Before that time it had spread rapidly throughout the then known world creating a powerful beneficial influence that would never be erased. Numerous factors were responsible for this diminishment. Those same factors still affect many aspects of our contemporary church. It is imperative for us to face, acknowledge and address these issues if we seriously want to return to the true New Testament pattern.

1. SEVERANCE FROM ITS ROOT SYSTEM

Initially, the church was wholly comprised of Jews. Its initiation in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, a Jewish Feast, constituted the grafting in of the church as a wild olive branch into the root and fatness of Israel. (Rom 11:17,18)

“But some of these branches from Abraham's tree, some of the Jews, have been broken off. And you Gentiles who were branches from, we might say, a wild olive tree, were grafted in. So now you, too, receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in God's rich nourishment of his own special olive tree.”

(Romans 11:17 Living)

It is surely sobering for Christians to realise that God refers to the Gentiles as a “wild olive branch” grafted into Israel’s root and trunk. Ten chapters of church history pass before the major grafting began to be initiated. It was not until Acts 15 that the Jerusalem council met to discuss how to assimilate the new Gentile believers into the still predominantly Jewish church. In the years that followed, history was reversed as the increasingly dominated Gentile church began to erase its Jewish roots.

The New Testament is not a denial of the Old. It is the fulfillment! Everything we have as Christians, has come to us through Christ and His Jewish brethren. Israel is the root and trunk into which the Gentile branches were grafted. It was through that root and trunk system that the nourishment flowed.

*“Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the priesthood service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers **and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.**” (Rom 9:4,5).*

An important factor of the church’s diminishing was the conscious, deliberate alienation of Christianity from its Jewish roots through the change in the membership of the church that took place by the end of the 2nd century. At that point, Christians with Gentile backgrounds began to outnumber Jewish Christians.

Sadly, the church gradually began to move away from, and later to deny their Jewish origins. The deliberate abandonment of Jewish roots and traditions, which for the most part were Biblically based, created a huge vacuum in church life that demanded to be filled with something.

The vacuum thus created left room for the adoption of many new, (Christian?) innovations, many of which were actually pagan in origin. Christmas and Easter, both originally pagan festivals, are two of the more obvious examples of this. Unfortunately many other influences were accepted too, most of which were Hellenistic (Greek) in origin. These included the prominence of intellectualism and Greek philosophy and culture.

Just as a plant, severed from its root system, will wither and die, so the church, when separated from its true roots began to wither up.

Throughout ensuing church history a theological position has been held by many that relegates “the natural branches” to an irrelevant status. To them, the church is the new Israel and the original (true) Israel is only a fact of history.

2. INTELLECTUALISM AND PHILOSOPHY

At its origin, Christianity was a heart experience and an oral tradition. The Good News of Christ’s resurrection spread from mouth to ear. Ironically, the New Testament church did not possess a New Testament. Obviously the Apostles also began to substantiate their claims by showing that the Jewish Scriptures had foretold the events of Christ’s life, death and resurrection. They substantiated and authenticated the Gospel by the writings of the prophets. Succeeding generations of Christian leaders also began to interpret the Faith by the writings and thoughts of others.

Since only the scholars were truly literate in those days the tasks fell largely to the intellectuals among them, many of whom were strongly Hellenistic in their views. The growing influence of the scholars emphasised the importance of intellectual scholarship. They became the authoritative voice, the theologians of their day. Through their influence the Gospel moved away from its original simplicity and its experiential nature, assuming the posture of a philosophy instead.

When differing interpretations of the Christian message arose, official church councils during the 300s and 400s produced definitive formulations of basic doctrines, which are still accepted by most Christians. Unfortunately many of these decisions were powerfully influenced by the Hellenistic views held by many of the theologians.

The prominence of the Septuagint, (Greek Bible) and the influence of many scholars in Hellenistic Alexandria, pulled the church even further into the influence of Greek thought and philosophy.

These influences transferred dependence on the Holy Spirit, to a dependence upon the natural, intellectual skills of human acumen. It also introduced a new value placed on education and learning although the early Apostles were mainly unlettered and ignorant men who relied on the Holy Spirit:-

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realised that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13).

The authority and effectiveness of the early Apostles came not from human wisdom or higher learning but from the fact that they had manifestly been with Christ. Today the priority is often on academic learning and achievement rather than spiritual maturity and anointing. There is nothing inherently wrong with education and learning as long as one does not depend on it for the effectiveness of one’s ministry. To replace natural knowledge and skills for the anointing of the Spirit is a futile exercise and an insult to the Holy Spirit.

One great difference between Jesus and many modern preachers was that Jesus took the most profound subjects and made them simple and easy to understand, while modern preachers take the simplest subjects and make them so complicated that nobody understands them!

3. A CLERGY/LAITY SYSTEM

It was at this time that new systems of hierarchy were introduced into the church including ordination of clergy as distinct from and superior to the laity. This concept was further refined in ensuing years until a great gulf existed between the “priesthood and the people.”

Ordination was required for the performance of all aspects of ministry, relegating the lay people to a passive role of virtual non-involvement. This system has robbed the church of the massive potential that lies in the body of the church, the Body of Christ.

It was these very “lay” people who actually spread the Gospel so widely in its earliest days. Only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem, the remainder of the church was scattered abroad.

“Therefore, those (the laos) who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.” (Acts 8:4).

4. POLITICAL COMPROMISE

The Emperor Constantine the Great decided to officially endorse the new religion. His favour assured the church a privileged place in society.

In 330 Constantine moved the capital of the empire from Rome to Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople. The emperor at Constantinople held a special place in the life of the church. It was he, for example, who presided over the general councils of the church.

This new relationship afforded the church a legal protection and sense of security but was it was not without cost. Allegiance to both Constantine and Christ were impossible. No man can serve two masters! Conforming to the requirements and expectations of Constantine made it impossible to fully obey Christ too.

Many devout Christians began to feel that standards of Christian conduct were being lowered and that the only way to obey the moral imperatives of Christ was to flee the world.

5. LIAISON OF CHURCH AND STATE

In the era of the Early Church it clashed repeatedly with various State bodies over the delineation of their respective spheres of authority. However, after the advent of Emperor Constantine, the church adopted a new attitude towards political authorities. It welcomed its overtures of reconciliation but compromised its standards in order to do so. The church became subservient in many ways to the dictates of the State.

6. MONASTICISM, CONTEMPLATION AND ISOLATION

One result of this was the rise of Christian monasticism which began in the Egyptian desert and spread to many parts of the Christian empire during the 300s and 400s. Christianity was never intended to be practised in isolation. Monasticism made the practise of Christianity distinctly introvert and insular. It was driven into itself instead of launching out into the wider world. This resulted in a severe slowing down of the evangelistic program as launched by Jesus and the early church. It also robbed the church of initiative and influence.

Monastic contemplation isolated the church from the real world. The ecclesiastical leaders became “other worldly” and unrealistic. They lived in a dream world, completely separated from the reality and trials of the real world. The monks lived out their days in religious isolation fashioning a lifestyle inherently unsuited to the rigors and problems of the masses.

Many of the innovations that were embraced during this isolation were obviously adopted as replacements of earlier spiritual activities. For example monastic chants probably replaced “singing in the Spirit” or the “spiritual songs” mentioned by Paul. Eph 5:18,19. Various

liturgies replaced the more spontaneous worship evidenced in the Corinthian church. The church became more sacramental in its orientation adopting colourful forms and ceremonies to replace “the glory” that was departing.

7. RELIGIOUS RITUAL AND SYMBOLISM

The simple spirituality of the early church soon become overlaid with religious ritual. Unfortunately, much of that ritual was imported from pagan religions complete with various icons and symbols. Many of the simple ordinances that Christ commanded became complicated with the addition of sacramental adornments. This was particularly true in the Eastern world where the plain truth of the Gospel was over embellished with pageantry and imagery including icons.

8. INSTITUTIONALISM

Unfortunately the numerical growth and spread of the church, plus many other humanistic influences, led to the adoption of Institutionalism. The need for organisation often does this and it is not necessarily a problem or a bad thing in respect of businesses and secular organisations. However, the church is not an organisation, it is an organism. Institutionalism represents human organisation that becomes centralised, humanly governed, regimented and legalised. It tends to rule by popular vote and the will of the people. The church of Laodicea is a sad image of what this can produce.

Whereas, in contrast, the early church was simplistic, virile, mobile, flexible and adaptable.

9. MORAL LAXITY INSTEAD OF HOLINESS

The changed practises of Christianity from aggressive evangelism to monastic type introversion, plus the institutionalisation of the church and the exaltation of so called “princes” within the church, led to sensual excesses that in turn gave rise to carnal and licentious living. The priesthood which was a law unto itself, engaged in every kind of selfish indulgence, introducing grave moral laxity into the church

The Dark Ages

The increasingly carnal nature of the church produced spiritual darkness instead of light, and plunged the whole world into a period of gross darkness, depression and unenlightenment that became known historically as The Dark Ages. Throughout this entire period the light of the church glowed very dimly, failing to illuminate the world. Creativity and progress was almost non existent and the world became a sad example of a people without the light of God.

The decreasing light of the church for many years brought a darkness to humanity that was unprecedented. It affected every area of life throughout the Western world. The worst period lasted from approximately 450AD to 1,000 AD.

This was a sad period of profound spiritual and moral darkness

As a result, many people became hungry to re-discover God. This spiritual unrest and innovation resulted in the 16-century Protestant Reformation.

The Reformation

Fourteenth-century English reformer John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English to make it available to common people. He also preached in English, rather than Latin making the Gospel available and understandable to the common masses. John Wycliffe’s influence in birthing the Reformation is without comparison.

He was variously known as the “Morning Star of the Reformation” and the “Father of the English Reformation.” His followers, known as “Bible men” were the forerunners of the non-conformist, protestant churches. Wycliffe’s influence was greatly increased through

these men. His methods, powerfully instrumental in birthing the Reformation of his time should be carefully noted for their use could also precipitate a new reformation in our day.

Obviously many other powerful figures became influential in the process of reformation. However, John Wycliffe is generally perceived as the “Father of the Reformation” and his life and ministry undoubtedly laid the foundation and established the direction of it.

John Wycliffe was undoubtedly a man of powerful personal conviction founded upon the truths of the Bible.

- a) He translated the Bible from Latin, into popular English, the language of the people.
- b) He made the forbidden book available to the common people.
- c) He simplified Bible doctrine, removing its mysteries.
- d) He relied utterly on the Holy Spirit.
- e) He was a preacher with uncompromising prophetic boldness.
- f) He interpreted God’s truth in simplicity and plainness.
- g) He proclaimed it with evangelistic fervour and drama.
- h) He trained laymen as preachers who spread the Word everywhere.
- i) He insisted that they simplify their messages to the comprehension of their listeners.
- j) He insisted that sermons be plain, simple, practical and applicable
- k) k. He discouraged academic training and preparation, emphasizing the importance of experiential knowledge. He declared, “An unlearned man, with God’s grace, does more for the church than many graduates. Scholastic studies breed rather than destroy heresies.”
- l) l. He utilised popular music and drama in Gospel presentation.

The birth of Lutheranism

The Protestant revolution began in Germany in 1517, when theologian Martin Luther published his 95 theses challenging the theory and practice of indulgences. Papal authorities ordered Luther to submit to church authority and threatened him with excommunication. Undeterred, Luther publicly burned the papal decree of excommunication. German royalty and ecclesiastics assembled in 1521 at the Diet of Worms and ordered Luther to recant. He refused and was declared an outlaw.

Lutheranism spread into Denmark and Sweden, where the monarchical governments sponsored the reform movement and broke completely with the papacy. Swiss pastor Huldreich Zwingli headed the reform movement in Switzerland. In Zürich he led efforts to burn religious relics, abolish ceremonial processions and the adoration of the saints, release priests and monks from their vows of celibacy, and replace the Mass with a simpler communion service.

The greatest contribution that Luther made to the Reformation was undoubtedly due to the powerful revelation he received of “Justification by faith.” This revelation is foundational to the restoration of the church of the true Gospel.

The Lutheran church as an institution is an anomaly. It exists against the wishes of its founder. Luther once said,
“To establish and to follow many sects in the faith, is tantamount to dividing God into many gods, and to giving to Him many names. A sect (denomination) is nothing but a schism, which is forbidden by God, from the true, universal, invisible church, an act committed by an earthly being. I do not approve of the doctrine and the people called Lutheran. No one must say, “I am a Lutheran” or “I am a Papist” for neither Luther nor the pope died for us, and neither of them was our teacher, but Christ alone was our teacher.”

The Dawn of Protestantism

Protestantism was welcomed in the Netherlands and Scotland, where the movement was used as a vehicle for national self-determination and independence. In Scotland, as in other countries, the Reformation originated among elements of the population already hostile to the Roman Catholic church. Scottish reformer John Knox led the actual revolution and established Calvinism as the national religion of Scotland. In England, many people did not consider the Church of England sufficiently reformed. They eventually formed Calvinist sects such as the Presbyterians, Puritans, Separatists, and Quakers.

Some Results of the Reformation

In the 1600s and 1700s it became evident that Christianity would be obliged to define and to defend itself in response to the rise of modern science and philosophy. The increasing secularization of society removed the control of the church from areas of life, especially education, over which it had once been dominant. The gradual separation of church and state represented a departure from a system that had held sway since the conversion of Constantine the Great.

The Reformation was but one step in God's program to restore His church. Following this came numerous other times of restoration including the great Wesleyan Revival (18th Century) that culminated eventually in the Pentecostal Revival of the early 1900's and later the world wide Charismatic Revival that began in the early 1950's.

Just as God did not intend His people to stop at the revelation He gave to Martin Luther, or Wesley, neither does he desire His church to remain at the wells of Pentecost. He wants His people to keep moving forward in revival increments until we experience the Former and Latter rain together as He predicted in Joel 2.

Chapter Three

The Church Of The Future

In this study, we are mainly considering the church as existing in three time periods.

1. The Early church of the New Testament.(1st Century)
2. The Middle Ages church of the dark ages.
3. The future church preceding the return of Christ. (Late 20th and early 21st Century)

The church of the middle ages can *NEVER* be a role model for the church of the future! It was not fashioned “according to the Biblical pattern.”

The Bible predicts that in the last days, prior to the return of Christ, there will be a glorious restoration to the church of all that the prophets foretold. The prophets also predicted a joining of Jew and Gentile believers.

Acts 3:19-21

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”

(NIV)

A RETURN TO OUR ROOTS

The scriptures foretell a time, in the last days, when the attention of the whole world will be focussed upon Jerusalem and Israel. Zech 12:2,3. There will be a world wide antipathy towards Israel culminating in a huge military attack on her.

“All nations of earth are gathered against it.” (Jerusalem) (Zech 12:3).

At that time every Christian and every church will be forced to declare its position in relation to Israel. The situation will be so critical that no one on earth will be able to remain neutral. The political, religious, military and economic might of the nations will be ranged against her. No one will be exempt from making a firm decision on the future of Israel. The true church will then take an uncompromising stand with Israel. This will undoubtedly divide Christendom, separating the true church from the false. To stand against Israel at this time will be to stand against God for He will be fighting in their behalf.

True Christians, brethren of Jesus, will not be able to ignore or neglect His brethren “after the flesh.” Rom 9:5. This period of world tension and crisis will not end until God personally intervenes on Israel’s behalf in the process reveals Himself as the crucified Messiah. Zech 12:9,10.

THE REPENTANCE OF JERUSALEM

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.¹⁰ And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the

inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

Zech 12:9,10 (KJV)

Several powerful things are predicted here

God will fight against and destroy the nations that attack Israel.
He will pour out, on the Israelites, the spirit of grace and supplication.
Their national spiritual blindness will be healed.
They will recognise Messiah as a first born and only son.
Israel will mourn for Him as for a firstborn son.

He will then, (Zech 13: 1,2)

Open a fountain in the House of David, for sin and uncleanness.
Cleanse the land of idols and unclean spirits.

PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATION

Acts 3:19-21

*“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,
and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before,
whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”* (NKJ)

These verses in Peter’s second sermon are clearly prophetic and eschatological (relating to the End Times) They predict a “Restoration of all things spoken by the prophets” associated with the return of Christ. Peter clearly states that the heavens must retain Jesus Christ, until those “ times of restoration”.

Restoration will precede, accompany and follow Christ’s return

Christ’s return will occur in the midst of a time of refreshing and revival. The refreshing restoration will be happening prior to His return. His actual return will augment and accelerate the revival. Once He comes, He will instigate a lot more change.

FIRST CENTURY POWER, TWENTY FIRST CENTURY RELEVANCE

The times of restoration will restore the church to its original power and glory in order to accomplish the work of gathering in the End Time harvest. The restoration will be to a church comparative to the first century church., but it will be a 21st Century church. Its purity, power and effectiveness will be as the early church, but its relevance will be to the 21st century world.

It will have the power dynamic of the 1st century church but a contemporary relevance to the 21st century. It will bridge the gulf between the centuries of church history. The early church was a contemporary (up-to-date) model relevant to its day. The 21st century church must be contemporary and relevant to ITS day.

As a necessary preparation to this restoration, the contemporary church must return to certain principles that were an integral part of the early church.

The path to that restoration follows a certain direction. (Acts 3:19-21)

- a) Repentance: “metenoia”, A dynamic change of mind, and perspective.
- b) Conversion: A change of direction and purpose.
- c) Release from the past. “sins blotted out”. Phil 3:15. “*Forgetting those things that are behind*”.
- d) “Times of refreshing” from the face (*prosopon*) of the Lord. A fresh move of the Spirit.
- e) “Times of restoration” of all things spoken by the prophets.
- f) The return of Christ from heaven.

This scripture presents five sources of transforming power for the Christian.

1. REPENTANCE MEANS CHANGE

Change Your Mental Attitude.

Repentance has assumed very religious connotations such as Weeping, Crying out, Begging forgiveness, Sackcloth and ashes, Self humiliation, Self condemnation, Seriousness, Sombreness, Downcast, Sad, Legalistic.

But *Metanoia*: (The Greek word for repentance) has many, other than religious applications. It means to reconsider. Think (and act) differently afterwards. Change your mental attitude. Undergo a Radical change of mind. Embrace a brand new perspective. To make an “About turn”. (To turn 180 degrees.)

2. CONVERSION MEANS CHANGE

Greek: *Epistrepho* ' "To revert (to God's ways) figuratively, morally, literally. About turn! To change or adapt into another form, character or function. True conversion has a very radical connotation. (Synonyms. Alteration, transformation, regeneration, metamorphosis)

“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; all things have become new”. (2 Cor 5:17)

The new convert does not simply become religious, reading the bible and attending some church. There is an actual transformation. They truly become a new person. The changes are not merely peripheral. They are not simply changes in outward appearance. Conversion begins in the deepest part of ones being and utterly transforms the whole life as it works its way out in every day life and relationships.

Conversional transformation does not all happen at one time. It is an ongoing process. Its effectiveness surfaces in the crises experiences of life, when God causes all things to work together for good, to those that love Him and are called according to His divine purposes. (Rom 8:28)

The Apostles discovered this truth in some of their greatest extremities. For example, Peter experienced it at a time that Satan’s attack on him was at its strongest.

Luke 22:31-32

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen (Sterizo: turn them resolutely in another direction) thy brethren.”

Jesus surrounded Peter with His prayer at that time, that his faith should not fail or prove inadequate. He confidently forecast, “When you are converted (changed, strengthened, transformed) you will then be able also to help your peers to go in the right direction too. Jesus knew that in the midst of this deep trial, when Satan planned to sift Peter through his fingers like wheat, Peter would be transformed into a stronger believer and be better able to encourage and instruct his fellow believers in the life of faith and victory.

3. **BLOTTING OUT SINS MEANS FORGETTING THE PAST**

Exhaleipho. Erased, Obliterated, Wiped away. (by Christ's Blood)

The atonement of Christ does not merely "cover over" our sins. It eradicates and obliterates them completely. They are destroyed. They exist no more. Unfortunately, many Christians are like Lazarus, bound hand and foot with grave clothes. They have committed their lives to Christ and accepted His forgiveness but they have not understood how totally God has wiped out their transgressions. Consequently the enemy is constantly referring them to the awareness of their memory. He taunts them with sins of the past. He seeks to destroy their confidence and authority. But, as with Lazarus, Jesus commands, "Loose him and let him go!" God has cast the record of our past sins into an ocean of forgetfulness. He remembers them no more. We must do the same. Let the past be buried and forgotten so that we can inherit our new future.

The word for sins in this verse is *Hamartia* meaning To fall short of. i.e. short comings, character blemishes, inherited weaknesses. Not only have we forgiveness for the sins of the past, we also have redemption and release from potential sins of the present.

There are sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. The sins of the flesh are usually very obvious, but those of the spirit are covert and hidden. They are spiritual pride, self righteousness, self sufficiency, resistance against God, kicking against the pricks. (Acts 9:5) God is more grieved by the sins of **His** children than those of the devil's children.

4. **TIMES OF REFRESHING TRANSFORM THE SOUL**

"Times of refreshing" means to recover your breath with a breath of fresh air.

It is a life transforming experience that totally refreshes the limpid soul. It releases the fainting soul into a new dimension of life, liberty, joy and rejoicing. It is an oasis in the wilderness to the thirsty soul that has almost expired, exhausted by the heat of the day. It is a new lease of life to the weary soul that has almost expired.

The word for "presence", i.e. *prosopon*, = **face** of the Lord. Just as God breathed into Adam the breath of lives and man became a living soul, (Gen 2:7) so the breath of God's presence restores and transforms our fainting souls. Pentecost came as a mighty, rushing wind from heaven. (Acts 2:2.) The wind of God's Spirit today comes as a strong breeze, breathing fresh life into everything it touches. The breath of refreshing is like spiritual "mouth to mouth" resuscitation from the face of the Lord.

Likewise, as we behold God, face to face, in spiritual communion, we are changed, transformed, altered, mutated, into His image. As we gaze on Him face to face, we are literally changed into His image.

***"But we all with open face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being changed into that same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord."* (2 Cor 3:18)**

5. **TOTALLY CHANGED! WHEN WE SEE CHRIST**

Our final transformation, the grand finale of all the present work of change, will finally transform us into the image of Christ.

1 Cor 15:51-52

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (NIV)

I Jn 3:2

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. (KJV)

THE BLUE PRINT WAS COMPROMISED.

The early church commenced as a pattern of what the church was to be. Unfortunately, before too long, it yielded to carnal influences and deteriorated into a pale copy of what God intended it to be. By the Middle ages, it had become corrupted to a frightening degree that necessitated a great reformation to begin restoring it to its former pattern.

The reformation began through the instrumentality of Martin Luther, an ordained priest of the corrupted version, to whom God gave fresh revelation. The emphasis of Justification by faith became the foundation of the reformed church. Subsequently God followed through with further revelations and visitations that eventually took the form of the great Pentecostal revival of the 20th century. This has found expression more recently in the Charismatic renewal of the 1980's onwards. God is now preparing to introduce another great phase of restoration which will herald an End Time revival before the return of Christ.

The pathway to that revival will eventuate from radical changes. The church has fallen from its original, God ordained calling to a lesser purpose. God is now determined to bring about its restoration.

Throughout most of church history the church drifted into compromise. It fell :-

1. FROM RELIGIOUS RESPECTABILITY TO HEART REPENTANCE

Repentance, -is the first word of the Gospel. It is the foundation stone of our Faith. Repentance demands a total change in attitude, perspective and life style. Not an outward change of external conformity, but an inner transformation of the heart and mind. The command, "Repent" means "About turn." March in the opposite direction to what you were previously facing.

It was the first word that Jesus proclaimed in His public ministry

Mark 1:14-15

"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (NIV)

It was the first word that Peter spoke at the inauguration of the church.

Acts 2:38

"Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (NKJ)

It is the dominant word that Christ spoke to the Laodicean church of the last days.

Rev 3:19

*"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, **and repent.**" (NIV)*

In Acts 2:38, Peter lays the foundation of the Christian Faith. Christ had given him the "keys of the Kingdom", (Matt 16:19) now he uses those keys to open to gates of the Kingdom. The password into that Kingdom was "Repent".

Repentance. About turn. Change your direction completely

Baptism. Burying the old life

Receive the Holy Spirit. Move on into the new life in the Spirit.

It should still be the first emphasis of the Gospel message.

The word repent has many religious overtones, but its basic root meaning is to "Change radically". The emphasis on **change** is therefore introduced at the very inception of

Christianity. Peter's reply to the question, "What shall we do?" was Change....Change.....Change.

From its inception the church experienced major changes.

From the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

From Judaism to Christianity.

From worship in Jerusalem to "Worshipping in Spirit and in truth". John 4:23,24.

From the Temple to house churches.

From Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth. Acts 1:8.

Following the spiritual decline in the Middle ages, God commenced a series of phases of restoration, beginning with Luther's revelation "The just shall live by faith", right through to the Charismatic renewal of the 1980's.

2. FROM RELIGION TO REDEMPTION

The emphasis of the early church was clearly on the redemption purchased by Christ's death and resurrection. In the course of its history the church its emphasis has passed from Redemption to Religion.

Redemption is the dramatic transformation that takes place when the full extent of Christ's redemptive work is understood and totally accepted. It is apprehended by faith alone in the complete work of Calvary.

Religion is man's attempt to tie himself back to God. (re-figure) This is sought through the performance of good (dead) works, respectable living, church attendance etc. Religion is also composed of rites, ceremonies and rituals.

Unfortunately, repentance and redemption are no longer emphasised in many churches. The requirement for entrance has become religion and respectability rather than redemption.

There is a sure measure by which one can distinguish religion from redemption.

Religion represses, but Redemption releases.

3. FROM TEMPORAL BUILDINGS TO SPIRITUAL TEMPLES

Acts 17:24

*"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and **does not live in temples built by hands.**" (NIV)*

1 Cor 3:16

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (NIV)

The emphasis of the early church was on the believers as the temples of God. For the first three hundred years of church history, the church did not have consecrated buildings. Most of the world wide Body of Christ met in house churches. Larger gatherings were held in public places. The church did not own or consecrate any buildings as places of worship. It was a church on the move. In later years this changed from Functional convenience to religious consecration.

The influence towards dedicated religious buildings, (Temples) came into the church from pagan religious sources. Temples dedicated to various deities was all part of heathen worship.

Many traditional church buildings seem totally incongruous to their surroundings. Their architectural style frequently links them to bygone eras and their Western image appears

incompatible with the non Western world. Their antiquated designs speak of the past instead of the present and future. They are often incongruous to their surroundings.

4. FROM CLEVER “SERMONS” TO ANOINTED MESSAGES

1 Pet 4:11

“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. (NIV)

The preaching and teaching of the early church **was not** with “enticing words of human wisdom”, but in the power and demonstration of the Spirit. (1 Cor 2:4) They spoke words inspired by the Holy Spirit, rather than platitudes of human learning and wisdom. Their messages were inspired, anointed, practical and relevant. In this, as in many other things, they followed the example of Jesus. His public addresses were such that the average (greatest number) of people responded with great interest to his talks.

Mark 12:37

*“Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?” **And the common people heard Him gladly.** (NKJ)*

Mark 12:37

*“David himself calls him 'Lord.' How then can he be his son?” **The large crowd listened to him with delight.** (NIV)*

The talks that Jesus gave appealed enormously to:-

The common (average) people. They listened to him gladly.

Unconverted people. The average people of His day were not “Christian” believers.

The masses of common, average persons. (Not an elite few)

His messages were topical, contemporary, positive, practical, and helpful. He often took a most profound subject and made it so simple and understandable that the masses gladly listened to Him.

5. FROM RELIGIOUS FORMALITY TO SPIRITUAL REALITY

Church services in New Testament times were largely spontaneous in nature. The churches did not yet have a liturgy or fixed form of service. New Testament gatherings were spontaneous, spiritual and informal. Today the order of service in many churches leaves little room for the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Such services have become predictable, formal and boring. The fresh move of God’s Spirit throughout the earth will be distinguished by spiritual reality rather than religious formality.

Someone suggested this intriguing definition:

“A church worship service should create an atmosphere conducive to the occurrence of miracles.”

What constitutes atmosphere?

How much does “atmosphere” contribute to spiritual activity.

How is atmosphere created? Ambience, feel, impression.

What are contributing factors? Venue, music, spiritual, emotional factors.

Preaching to produce atmosphere of faith, co-operation, decision.

6. FROM CLUB MEMBERSHIP TO BODY MEMBERS

Acts 2:41

“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.” (NIV)

Acts 2:47

“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (NIV)

In the Bible the Church of Jesus Christ is represented as a body of which every person is a body part, an organ or a limb.

1 Cor 12:12-14

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body-- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free-- and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (NIV)

Every new believer is merged into the Body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, to become a particular member, i.e. a specific part, limb, or organ with specific functions to perform.

The emphasis of churches today has made membership more like a club affiliation. One joins the club, pays the required fees, attends official meetings, votes for the minister and fulfills all the requirements of membership in a club.

7. FROM ORDAINED CLERGY TO ANOINTED WARRIORS

The leadership of the early church were anointed laymen. They came from many different callings and professions. The Apostles were trained by Christ Himself as they accompanied Him for three years. They were trained in an “on the job” training mode. After Pentecost, they became the trainers, discipling and preparing the new converts who became, for the most part, lay leaders of the churches. None of the Apostles had theological training except Paul who was previously a Rabbi.

From Chief Executive officers to Servant Leaders.

Phil 2:5-7

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” (NIV)

Paul says that the attitude of Christians and ministers in particular, should be of a humble servant similar to Christ.

In the days of Constantine, the style of leadership authority structure changed to that of the Political “Pyramid style.” manifest in the religious ecclesiastical heirarchy.

8. FROM MEMBERSHIP TO DISCIPLESHIP

Acts 6:7

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” (KJV)

Christ’s disciples were commanded to do two things which constituted the major elements of their charter.

Preach the Gospel. Mark 16:15.

Mark 16:15-16

“He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (NIV)

Make Disciples. Matt 28:19.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. ” Amen. (NKJ)

The emphasis of the modern church has gone from apprenticeship to church membership.

9. FROM CLUB STYLE MEMBERSHIP TO KOINONIA PARTNERSHIP

Acts 2:42

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,(Koinonia; partnership) and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (KJV)

Acts 2:44-46

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,” (NIV)

New converts in the early church were inducted into the Koinonia (partnership) of its members. It was a covenant relationship in which none lived for themselves, but each lived for another. It was an agreement that touched every area of life including goods and finances. It introduced a radical style of Christian commitment and community that shook the world. (Acts 17:6)

10. FROM HUMAN ABILITY TO SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

1 Cor 2:4-5

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.” (NIV)

From man's ability to God's power

Matt 28:18-19

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” (NIV)

Acts 3:6-8

“Then Peter said, ‘Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’”

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. “(NIV)

11. A RETURN TO WITNESSING IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (NIV)

The dynamic and rapid growth of the early church was largely due to the anointed activities of the body members.

Acts 8:4

“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” (NIV)

Only the Apostles remained in Jerusalem during the intense persecution. The church members were scattered to many places seeking refuge. Their flight did not persuade them to deny their commitment to Christ. Everywhere they went they spoke about Christ, persuading many to receive Him.

12. FROM CHURCH PROGRAMS TO POWER DEMONSTRATIONS

Acts 3:12

"When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" (NIV)

In this dynamic incident in the life of the early church, Peter made it very clear that they were ministering by the power of God and not by anything that they themselves could produce. The supernatural power of God was clearly demonstrated through their ministry, attracting the multitudes and convincing them of the reality of the Gospel.

It was only when this power began to wane following many compromises, that the church initiated programs to replace the spiritual manifestations. Much of the church today is program oriented depending on the skills and abilities of man. But the Holy Spirit is now renewing the church in many places, restoring the presence and power of the Spirit. Those churches are becoming Holy Spirit dependent instead of program oriented.

13. FROM ENTERTAINMENT TO EDIFICATION

Eph 4:15-16

"but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (NAS)

To edify means to build up, strengthen, join together, mutually uphold. They grew, as does a body, by the nourishment that every joint supplies. They did not merely entertain each other, they fed and nourished each other, providing mutual sustenance and strength to each other.

14. FROM "HOLY COMMUNION" TO COVENANT MEALS

When Holy Communion or The Lord's Supper, was first practised in the Early Church it was preceded and incorporated into a communal meal. The Church members actually ate together as a sign of their oneness, unity and inter-dependence. They had all things common, including food, fellowship and hospitality. The meals were often rather sumptuous, a matter that Paul had to rectify but not eliminate. Eating together has profound effects upon relationships. It fashions links of fellowship that nothing else can accomplish. These meals were a distinct attraction for outsiders, looking for friendship, fellowship and social ties. They symbolised social inter-dependence and covenant commitment. They were all members of a body, (Body organs and parts) rather than members of an institution.

Unfortunately, through the years it has deteriorated and diminished in significance until "The Lord's Supper" has become a thimble full of grape juice and a tiny piece of dry biscuit. The fellowship associated with it has also deteriorated in similar fashion until it has become a dry and withered version of the original fellowship.

As God restores to His church "all things spoken by the prophets" (Acts 3:21) the genuine covenant meals will also be restored.

15. FROM WORSHIP OBSERVATION TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Rom 12:1-2

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will." (NIV)

New Testament Worship involved a yielding of one's total self to God in expressions of Love and adoration. Worship was not something that one observed but something that one participated in whole heartedly.

God had commanded that worship of Him must be expressions of whole hearted love that involved the whole heart, mind, and strength of the worshipper. Dt 6:4; Matt 22:36-40.

16. FROM THE COME OF CONVENIENCE TO THE GO OF EVANGELISM

The last two commandments that Jesus issued began with the word GO.

1. Mark 16:15

*"He said to them, "**GO** into all the world and preach the good news to all creation". (NIV)*

2. Matt 28:18-20

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

***Go** ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen". (KJV)

He commanded His disciples to GO out and preach the Gospel but the church has changed His command to COME IN and hear the Gospel. Until the church obeys His initial command it will not see the benefits He promised. The church has become a denomination, institution, building instead of an Army, marching into the enemies territory to release men and women from Satan's bondage and to bring them into God's Kingdom.

17. FROM SUPPORTING MISSIONS TO ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Acts 1:8

*"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, **and to the ends of the earth.**" (NIV)*

Acts 8:4

"They therefore that were scattered abroad, went about preaching the word." (ASV)

Jesus decreed that His disciples should be missionaries, not merely people who supported missions with their finances. The mission field does not begin somewhere across the world. It begins right outside one's front door. The early church went everywhere, spreading the Gospel. (Acts 8:4)

18. FROM STUDYING EPISTLES TO BEING LIVING EPISTLES

2 Cor 3:2-3

"Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables (that are) hearts of flesh." (ASV)

Members of the early church did not merely study written epistles, (letters) they were themselves, living epistles, known and read by all men. Christianity in its original and purest form did not involve the pursuit of intellectual studies. (The epistles were not yet written) The disciples themselves were God's living, physical love letters. In much of the modern church there is an intellectual emphasis on theology and academia that was not found in the early church. Instead of a deep, academic study of the Bible, the early church members concentrated upon actually being living epistles in the every day life of their communities.

19. FROM CONSUMERISM TO PRODUCTIVITY

Too many Christians today are intent on “being blessed” instead of being made a blessing to others. They are chronic receivers instead of inspired givers. The very pattern of “church” with the congregation sitting before the pulpit, strengthens the concept that they are there to receive. The church has been likened to a football match where twenty two players on the pitch are desperately in need of rest and forty thousand spectators are urgently in need of exercise. The early church was certainly not a “bless me club” in which people sat quietly for hours hearing entertaining sermons and programs.

20. FROM A PEOPLE WHO ARE FEARFUL OF THE SLIGHTEST CHANGE TO PEOPLE WHO INITIATE DYNAMIC CHANGES

Acts 17:6

*“But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, **“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.”*** (NKJ)

The members of the Early church did not conform to the world, they transformed it. (Rom 12:1,2) They were certainly not afraid of change, they were AGENTS OF CHANGE. So dynamic was their impact on the world that even their enemies perceived them as world changers. Jesus commissioned them to be salt and light. Matt 5:13-16. Salt to cleanse and heal. Light to illuminate, overcoming spiritual and moral darkness.