

Apostolic Order in the Church

“Except the LORD build the house they labour in vain that build it.”

It takes a real love of the Truth, along with the discipline and illumination of the Holy Spirit, to be able to read the Bible and understand what it actually says. How wonderful to be able to read with a mind that, regardless of how often we have read this wonderful book, is still as a slate unwritten upon, and is ready to be imprinted afresh with truth. This is a difficult thing. All too readily we go to our Bible with preconceived notions as to what it has to say— notions that are biased by our own ambitions or agendas, or by long-established church traditions—things that are so deeply entrenched in our thinking that it is almost impossible to read without glasses coloured by such things. We read, and go away from our reading entirely unaware of what the Spirit of the Lord actually wanted us to discover.

It is our hope that this article will help toward such a discovery. We hope to show from the Bible the way the first Christians did church, bearing in mind that what we really want to know is not so much the outer form, but what motivated them to gather the way they did.

I am referring to this divine creation called the local church.

I read an old book recently that, among other things, addresses the importance of the local church in the purposes of God (*The Churches of God*, by G.H. Lang). It's a very enlightening—and very challenging—read. Lang speaks to a number of things, among them pointing out with backup from the Bible that the early apostles did not establish missions, they established churches—local autonomous assemblies that were subject to the Lord of the church Himself. This is a very important revelation with far reaching implications—which the Bible itself bears up.

Lang recounted the story of a young man who approached an aged saint for “such advice as his sixty years' experience as a servant of Christ might suggest as useful.” The old man concentrated it all into a single statement. “Never start a mission.”

Now, of all the things that could have been said to a young inquirer, why did this wise old saint make what appears to be such an arbitrary—perhaps even superficial—statement? But back of it is a principle of spiritual order that is at the very heart of the eternal purposes of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is a spiritual order—a law, actually—that the early apostles walked in, and propagated—the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. And ignorance of this law—or

disobedience thereto—accounts by and large for the chaos and weakness that debilitates Christendom in our world today.

It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that God intends to be the rule of the new creation order in His church—whether on the scale of one individual in relationship with Him, or of two or three when they are gathered together, or a handful, or a multitude that no man can number. He means them to be governed by a Law that puts Him vitally and functionally at the centre of all, reigning, governing, ordering all things Himself. It is a rule in which the lordship of Jesus Christ is a living, functioning reality, and not just creed and doctrine, in every facet of life both individual and corporate. And with it, ultimately God’s intent is to head up and harmonize “together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth...” (Eph. 1.10).

According to the general usage of the word today, a *mission* is, strictly speaking, not a church in itself. It is an outreach established by a missionary (or apostle) of some other church, and is dependent on the church that set it up, and accountable to it.

But—going to the Bible—when the first disciples were scattered from Jerusalem spreading the gospel, and churches began to spring up in many places as a result, Jerusalem was never given the distinction of being in any way central headquarters. We do see that when there was a major decision to be considered, counsel was sought of the apostles and elders who were there (Acts Ch. 15). But this did not make the Jerusalem church the seat of authority or central governing agency over other churches. The other churches were just that: churches in their own right, and not missions of the Jerusalem (perish the words) “mother church.”

The church at Antioch from which Paul and Barnabas went out did not seek approval of the Jerusalem church for the new venture. In fact it was not even the church at Antioch that sent these two out, actually. Yes, they prayed together and laid their hands on them. But we are clearly told these two apostles were “sent forth by the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13.4).

And so if Jerusalem was not headquarters, neither was Antioch. Paul and Barnabas did not go around forming the Antiochan church of Lystra, and the Antiochan church of Iconium—the kind of thing so common in our day. A powerful apostle or teacher starts a church that becomes successful, and he gives it a name, and before you know it hundreds of others bearing the same stamp and name spring up all over the land, with the first church being headquarters over it all.

But Paul and Barnabas did not indicate to the new converts in Lystra and Iconium that the church in Antioch would oversee them. The churches that sprang up as a result of their ministry were autonomous in their own right, and were simply referred to as “the churches of the Gentiles” (Rom.16.4). The early apostles never started missions. They planted churches—autonomous churches that were subject directly to the Lord of the church in Heaven. (I think we can fine tune this even further. I don’t find in Scripture that the apostles went forth primarily with an agenda to set up churches. The way they “planted churches” was to plant the word of the Gospel of the kingdom in people’s hearts; this resulted in churches springing up.)

And so, years later when Paul was saying his good-byes to the church of Ephesus—telling them they would see his face no more—he did not advise them that he would make arrangements to have some other apostle come over and fill his shoes. This is what he said:

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them which are sanctified” (Acts 20.32).

My, Paul, that’s pretty risky, isn’t it? God, and the word of His grace? Haven’t you got something a little more substantial you can leave them with? I think you’d better get in touch with some of our modern-day apostles, Paul. They’d help you out with something a little more realistic, and get the Ephesian church connected into a well-structured organization that could keep its finger on everything and make sure they don’t fall away from the apostolic paradigm.

But no... Paul leaves them in the hands of “the weakness of God,” admonishing the elders to:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which (the Greek has *among* which) the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the flock of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20. 28-30).

All the more reason, is it not, to make sure the flock is secured to some organization of apostles who can keep things on track and provide adequate protection from those who would exploit the flock of God for their own interests?

But no, it is actually *after* bringing forth this warning that Paul commends them to “God, and the word of His grace.” This would be more than adequate to preserve them from ravening wolves from without and ambitious hirelings from within seeking a following.

I believe that Paul did this—leaving the Ephesians to God and the word of His grace—because he had vision as to what God intends to bring forth by His local churches. For what God had in mind, it would be a vital necessity that churches be autonomous one from another—as far as divine government is concerned, that is. Of course they would continue in a very fluid way to be joined to one another in love, and in fellowship. There will always be an intermingling of brethren one with another from church to church. But God has ordained that the local church be governed by a divine order in which He Himself is assured of His lordship in the Spirit. In this way, the *many-faceted* wisdom of God is given full liberty of expression. The church being God’s new creation (or, the corporate expression of those who in Christ are new creations), what He intends to bring forth in each assembly will be a unique expression of that wisdom, to the praise of His glory. As in the old creation with all its beauty and diversity—yet awesome harmony—so also in the new creation. Men will yet marvel at the beauty of the Lord they see in God’s new creation: local churches that manifest His new creation beauty and wisdom in its many unique facets—yet at the same time in fearful harmony with one another—all the result of the governing power of the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.

How sad, then, that we think better of God, and substitute elaborate organization for this beautiful Law. Apparently the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus is too feeble a law for us. We mistrust the power of this Law, and instead of giving it free rein, man feels he must establish an organization that brings the churches of God under a central control. It happens so often. Lang points out that when the Spirit of the Lord moves afresh in the earth, and new churches spring up as a result of it, “then forthwith men will arise whose great business seems to be to federate these local assemblies into Fellowships, Unions, Denominations.... We are in no wise challenging motives, but only noting the remarkable and regrettable fact that so many servants of the Lord seem unable to do His work according to His plan and method.”

That was very gracious of Lang, not challenging the motives of people who do this kind of thing. But perhaps why they do it is understandable to some degree—the present denominational church system has been around for a long time. So it’s easy enough to take for granted that this is the way God intends churches to be structured and united together. There are many very dedicated and very sincere people in this system—both in pulpit and in pew—who love the Lord Jesus with

all their heart. And God Himself has often blessed them where they are, at times granting great revivals in a church order that is short of the desire of His heart. This does not mean, however, that He has forgotten the desire of His heart. Ultimately He will have things the way He wants them—churches ordered as He intends them to be ordered, so that His glory may be revealed in all Heaven and earth.

And so, let us see if we can discover to some extent just how He began to reveal this awesome new creation wonder—the church.

The Church, and the Churches

We start by affirming that, of course, God has ordained that His churches have leadership. But a careful read of the New Testament reveals that not once is mention made of the church of a specified geographical area—which, since all churches have a leadership, would imply an earthly leadership and headquarters over all the churches in that area—a concept that is foreign to Scripture. We are accustomed to think of, say, the church in Canada. Or the church in China. Or the Western Church. But we don't find this view of things anywhere in Scripture. For example, we find no such thing as the church of Galatia—a region now known as central Turkey. A church of Galatia would imply a leadership over that whole area—and thus, over the many assemblies in it. What we find is, “the churches of Galatia” (1 Cor. 16.1, Gal. 1.2). And there is no such thing as the church of Judea. Instead we read of, “the churches of Judea” (Gal. 1.22). Nor is there the church of Asia (now western Turkey), but “the churches of Asia” (1 Cor. 16.19), or “the seven churches which are in Asia” (Rev. 1.4). Ephesus (and its leadership) was not central headquarters over the other churches of Asia. Nor was Smyrna. Nor Philadelphia. Where was headquarters then? Headquarters was—and still is—where the Head of the church is. In Heaven. In the heavenly Jerusalem. In Zion. It this this church, and this one alone, that is “the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26).

When the word *church* is used in the singular in the Scriptures, it always refers to the one universal church of Christ in Heaven and earth, or to one particular assembly that is gathered in a specific location within a larger geographic area. So we read, “unto Him be glory in the church” (Eph. 3.21). Or, “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1.18). These are references to the one universal church of God.

Again, we read of “the church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8.1). “The church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Cor. 1.2). “The church that is in their house” (1 Cor. 16.19). Or in the Revelation, the seven churches of Asia become “the church of Ephesus,” “the church of Smyrna,” and so on. These are references to one particular assembly in a specific

location—the local church. In none of these is there any hint whatever of one church being overseen by another, or of a joint leadership over several churches. Rather, each local church has its own elders, and they are subject directly to the Lord of the church Himself.

How little we have seen of this beautiful order which is so important to the purposes of God. What we see on every hand is man's chronic attempt to get a handle on the work of God and organize it as he thinks best. Invariably he brings into the things of God methods and ways that spring not from the mind of the Spirit, but from the mind of the flesh. Thus he usurps for himself the lordship of the Spirit, and ultimately the Lord of the church will come in and root up what He has not planted, and tear down what He has not built up.

Leadership In The Churches

Certainly God has ordained that churches have leadership. But God's order as revealed in Scripture is that church leadership is to be integrally a part of that one assembly. There is no such thing as the appointment of one man, or even one group of men, in office over several churches anywhere in Scripture. Nowhere in Scripture do we discover the twelve apostles setting up a council or organization that ruled over the churches. Nor do we find any one of the apostles being set up as the one chief apostle in a pyramid type of organization over many churches in the various geographical areas. Yet this kind of thing is the very backbone of the organized church system. Even some "come-outer" groups, while scorning denominationalism, have adopted the same kind of organization. Granted, it came on the scene very early—as early as the second century—and has continued all through church history down to our day. But it's an order that is totally foreign to the Spirit of God, and we see no such thing in the scriptural record of the early churches.

We are not denying that God set apostles in the church with the authority to guide things according to His own direction. He set "in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers..." (1 Cor. 12.28). He gave these ministries to "the church." Paul is speaking of the whole church here—the one universal church, not just the local churches. And so the ministries (including the apostles) that God has given to the whole church are indeed a support to the local churches, but the kind of support that does not supplant the autonomy of the authority of local churches. There is not the slightest indication anywhere in the New Testament record that God intended any of these ministries to become a ruling council over the local churches. As we pointed out earlier, the Lord of the church Himself initiated things out of Antioch with no consultation whatever of the apostles in Jerusalem. Yes, when the church at Antioch was being troubled by the Judaizers, they did seek

the help of “the apostles and elders” who were in Jerusalem. This does not imply that the elders in Jerusalem were considered elders of the church at Antioch, although certainly the apostles there were recognized as being given “to the church,” that is, to the one universal church of which all local churches are a part. And so, of course, when a very difficult and very important question was to be resolved, these men were consulted; it was critical that an authoritative decision, not from Jerusalem, but from the Throne of heaven, go forth.

But Acts Chapter 15 does not set up a precedent for what we see so much of in our day—organizations with a “presiding apostle” over a council of apostles set up to govern churches and foster what they are calling “apostolic reformation” in the earth. A decade or so ago the emphasis was on the prophetic, and suddenly the church landscape was decorated with organizations of prophets. Now, apparently, we have moved up the ladder a rung. Now we see a proliferation of organizations of apostles proclaiming themselves to be the custodians of apostolic order in the churches. There are many. I know of two that (or so we are told) the Lord Himself apparently “commanded” to be set up. Really? Both, supposedly directed by the Lord, are to compete for the same territory? In any case, is it asking too much to require these apostles to show scriptural precedence for this? But there is no scriptural precedence for this. The early apostles set up no such organization. They knew better than to try to gather the Wind in their fist. On the contrary, it was they who were in the fist of the Wind—in His hand, that is; they were held and led by the Spirit of God. And thus, in all they said and did, it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who was building His church.

The early churches had no earthly headquarters comprised of an earthly apostle or group of apostles. The churches had great liberty; they were subject to the Lord of the church Himself. The early apostles knew keenly who the Presiding Apostle was, and the Pre-eminent One. And so unlike Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9) they did not seek pre-eminence. Take Peter, for example. Peter when giving a word to the elders gave it as being himself “an elder” (1 Pt. 5.1). Not *the* elder, but *an* elder. He could have settled it right there if he had wanted to exert his authority as the first pope, or even a senior pastor. But no, in humility he simply says, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who also am *an* elder...” What a beautiful example of true apostolic leadership. What humility and grace. And Peter called Paul “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pt. 3.15). No hierarchy there. Paul called Titus his brother (2 Cor. 2.13). Not a thought of one being over the other.

In fact nowhere in Scripture do we find this discipleship teaching (as it has been styled) that we must be under a ministry type of

“covering,” we must be “under the five-fold,” we must be “under an apostle,” or some strong prophet or teacher to be in proper order with God. Bible believers, take note. This is foreign to the scriptural record of the early churches. The first churches had no such hierarchy. Paul called Timothy his *workfellow*, that is, his fellow worker (Rom. 16.21), where most in our day would designate him a junior worker, or assistant pastor. The same with Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16.3, which the King James Version translates *helpers*, but is the same word *sunergos* that is translated *workfellow*). Paul used this word frequently with reference to others in ministry. So even with the great authority he had—and it was very great—it’s obvious he didn’t consider himself at the apex of some kind of ministerial hierarchy.

Just one example. Paul really wanted Appolus to go to Corinth with certain other brethren. “But his will was not at all to come at this time, but he shall come when he shall have convenient time” (1 Cor. 16.12). In other words, Paul recognized—and so did Appolus—that Appolus took his orders from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and not from Paul.

Yet the hierarchy model of leadership is taken for granted in our day as being biblical order; church as we know it is steeped in an ecclesiastical order that goes as far back as the days just after the first apostles left the scene—and perhaps in some areas even while they were still on the scene (see 2 Tim. 1.15, 2 Jn. 9). The one-man hierarchy very quickly took possession of the churches of God in certain areas, to the point where this type of order is now considered completely biblical: this is the way church is supposed to be, who dares question it?

Rulers... or leaders?

Even the beloved King James Bible (which I use and prefer myself) reflects this bias. Back in 1604 when King James called for a new English translation at the Hampton Court Conference, he was determined to keep in place the ecclesiastical structure of the established English church of his day. This way he would better be able to control it.

“The king gave the translators instructions designed to guarantee that the new version would conform to the (established) ecclesiology, and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its beliefs about an ordained clergy” (Wikipedia).

This was in a time when the Puritans were seeking church reform. They were pressing for a presbyterian (elder) order that would replace the official episcopal (bishop) government of the church with lay elders. King James would have none of it. The bishop system was far easier to

control. He could control ordained bishops. How could he control churches that were led by groups of elders committed to obeying God Himself?

And so King James stipulated that the translators were to preserve certain long-standing ecclesiastical words that appeared in previous English translations like the Bishop's Bible. For example, the word *church* was to be preserved, for by this time its meaning had been well established—that structure governed by an organized clergy. However, the actual Greek word for church is *ecclesia*, meaning simply *called out assembly*. But words like *assembly*, or *congregation*, which would more accurately translate the Greek—and which the beloved William Tyndale had introduced into the translation he had made as far back as 1534 at the expense of his life—were not to replace *church*. Other words that were to be preserved were *bishop*, and *deacon*, words that had come to imply designations of office, even though the original Greek carries no such implication.

Here are some passages from the King James Version that reveal this biased agenda.

“Remember them that have the rule over you...” (Heb. 13.7). The Greek is better translated, simply, “...them that guide you,” or, “your leaders” (Vine, Vincent, also KJV margin; the New American Standard has “...those who led you”; the NIV has “your leaders.”) Also verses 17 and 24, the same. In the mind of the apostle as expressed by the original Greek, there is no thought whatsoever of rulership *over* the flock of God.

This is confirmed by the passage in Acts where Paul gives his parting words to the elders of Ephesus.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts. 20.28).

I quoted this earlier but want to enlarge on it here. The Greek preposition translated *over* in the KJV is actually *en*, which ought to have been translated *in* or *among*. “...All the flock *among which* the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers.” Not, *over* which... It is the Greek *epi* that would have been used and translated *over*, if that's what Paul had meant. We see *epi* in the prefix of the Greek for overseer: *episcopous*, which simply means one who sees over, or watches over, the flock. (We get our word *scope* from the second part.) But this word *episcopous* is usually translated *bishop* in the KJV, a word which has come to mean

one of high rank in the church hierarchy, and usually over a number of churches. This is far from the original scriptural meaning. An overseer is not ruling over the flock, but as one *among* the sheep of God's pasture, he is watching over them, guiding them, leading them into green pastures where he gives them complete liberty to feed for themselves.

And so in the passage we quoted earlier in which Peter describes himself as *an* elder, the word *en* (in, or among) is translated correctly in the KJV. "The elders which are among (*en*) you I exhort, who also am an elder..." (1 Pt. 5.1). "Among you," he says. Not over, or above, you. And Peter exhorts his fellow elders to "feed (or shepherd, or pastor) the flock of God, taking the *oversight*" of the flock (vs. 2). That is, they are to see over, watch over, the flock, jealously protecting the liberty each one has been given to grow into what God has designed individually for them... and just keeping an eye out for dangers the sheep of God's pasture might not be seeing themselves.

One thing more we discover from the above passage is that it is the elders who are the pastors of the flock. "The *elders* which are among you I exhort... feed the flock of God (that is, *pastor* the flock of God)..." And it is they who are the overseers—the bishops. "...Pastor the flock of God, taking the oversight..." Also in the Acts passage. Paul is speaking to the elders of Ephesus when he says that the Holy Spirit has made them *overseers*. An elder in an assembly is, then, an overseer, a bishop. And he functions as a shepherd—a pastor. Where then does this order come from that places elders somewhere down the ladder, lower than bishops, lower even than pastors? No, it is the elders who are watching over the flock, and are the bishops (overseers). And they are themselves the *pastors*—the shepherds of the flock. It is cause for great sorrow, then, that somewhere along the way the term *senior pastor* came into existence. Chapter and verse, please? Oh, wait a minute. Yes—there is one—"...and when the *Chief Shepherd* shall appear..." (1 Pt. 5.4).

And the bishop. We long since have come to consider the word *bishop* some kind of prestigious ecclesiastical designation of office over a number of churches. This is not scriptural either. God never intended the ministries of the church to become offices positioning men to be rulers over His heritage. The KJV of 1 Tim. 3.1 is, "If a man desire the office of a bishop he desireth a good work." There again is King James' biased agenda. Translated accurately from the original Greek it is simply, "If a man desires overseership..." In Scripture—God's blueprint for the church—there is no such thing as the office of a bishop. The word *office* is conspicuously absent in the original Greek. The original thought simply expresses someone who desires to guide and watch over the flock of God—as their servant, not as their master.

The same with deacons (ministers). 1 Tim. 3.10 in the KJV is, “Then let them use the office of a deacon...” But again from the Greek it is simply, “Then let them serve...” As also at 1 Tim. 3.13. “They that have used the office of a deacon well” is simply, “served well.”

This concept that crept into the church so long ago—titling certain ones in leadership Bishop So-and-so, or Pastor So-and-so, or Apostle So-and-so—is entirely foreign to the Scriptures... and the heart of God. These are not offices over the church. They are descriptions of callings, of functions, of character. These men are not to be lords over God’s heritage. A true pastor will teach the people to say, “The LORD is my Pastor” (Ps. 23.1). A true apostle will turn the attention of the people to “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3.1). A true bishop, when there might be those inclined to admire him or look unduly to him, will be anxious to turn their attention—note, this comes from Peter, again—to “the shepherd and bishop (overseer) of our souls” (1 Pt. 2.25).

In the book I mentioned at the outset, Lang quotes extensively from another old writing—The Organization of the Early Christian Churches, by Edwin Hatch. Hatch was a greatly schooled man, and had done a lot of research into the churches of the second century and upward. He discovered that the bishop system—in which one man is in office over several churches—was even at that early hour already in place, supplanting the beautiful autonomous order of the Spirit that the first churches enjoyed.

But Hatch pointed out something else also. He discovered that there were churches here and there in the second and third centuries that felt no need whatsoever to be subject to the so-called bishop and his rulings. Not that they were being rebellious—far from it. They were simply walking in the order and liberty that the first apostles had established—churches that were autonomous, and subject to the Lord of the church Himself. So they felt no need, or requirement, to get under the one-bishop yoke. They had their own bishops—the elders of the local flock, the overseers, the shepherds—who were *guiding* that flock of God, not ruling over it. They were *among* the flock—they were sheep themselves, in fact—not a special clergy set up over them. This—the clergy/laity distinction—Hatch clearly documents was a later development and definitely not the order of the primitive churches.

The First... Peter

Just a note here about Peter; we have referred to him a couple of times. Our Lord Jesus Christ had called Peter first.

“The first, Simon, who is called Peter...” (Mt. 10.2).

And so Peter just knew he was to be out in front somewhere. And rightly so. But oh, how the Great Shepherd of the sheep had to deal with this man Peter before his eyes were opened to see what it truly means to be out in front of the flock of God. Oh, the heart searchings Peter had to go through. The Lord Jesus led him through them with great love. And as a result of it all, we are not surprised to find a broken Peter, a very humble man now, writing the things we quoted above... about the character of those who shepherd the flock of God... about elders not exercising lordship over God’s heritage as though it were their own possession... and about submission. He exhorts the younger ones to submit to the elder ones. But then he adds, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pt. 5.5).

Peter is exhorting the very thing Jesus lovingly taught his chosen apostles—that they were to be mindful not to be as the rulers of the Gentiles, who exercise lordship over others, but to be among others as ministers, as servants—even as bondslaves (Mt. 20.25-28). Open our eyes, Lord: do we like titles? What about Bondslave So-and-so, then? We never hear that one. Yet that’s the way the early apostles often referred to themselves—as bondslaves. They were bondslaves before they were apostles. But it’s no surprise, the humility of these men, considering the way they had learned from their beloved Lord and Master, who was among them as One who served—a *minister* (Lk. 22.27).

On the other hand it’s quite something, considering the calling upon them. Christ had told them that those who faithfully followed Him and shared His sufferings, “in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt. 19.28). Just a minute, now. Is not this a council of twelve ruling over the churches? Does this not pull down all I have said? No, far from it. Exactly the opposite—when we acknowledge the kind of kingdom government these humble men established.

Let’s look at this passage. Jesus told Peter:

“Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.

And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me,

That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk. 22.28-30).

Notice the context in which Jesus makes this promise to the twelve. This is at the end of the very conversation about the way the kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over others. “But ye shall not be so” (Lk. 22.26). The apostles had just been arguing which of them would be the greatest. Jesus patiently shows them the nature of true leadership in His kingdom.

“But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief (that leads), as he that doth serve.”

And so when the Son of man ascended to the right hand of the Father and sat on the Throne of His glory, and sent forth the Holy Spirit, these men also sat on their thrones—in a kingdom of priests—and went forth with the Gospel of that Kingdom. They sowed that Kingdom in the earth, laid the foundation of the true spiritual order of the kingdom of God, and nurtured and protected that order. What we see in the scriptural record—the way the early churches were ordered—is the shape the Kingdom of God took as these early apostles sat on their thrones judging the twelve tribes of the Israel of God. Certainly the apostles were to have great authority in the churches. But the twelve did not attempt to bring the churches into some kind of great federation over which they ruled. On the contrary, they encouraged local churches to function autonomously, on occasion aiding them as they did so, as we see Paul doing in 1 Cor. 5.3-5. But for the most part they ministered to them the word of the Lord, the truths of the kingdom of God, and then left them to order their affairs themselves. *That* is apostolic order. Sadly, this order was quickly supplanted with the man-made thing so prevalent in the churches of our day—the sorry pattern of the kingdoms of the Gentiles.

[Note: I am viewing “the regeneration” from what has been called a preterist standpoint, at the same time recognizing that this is a very vast subject, and that there is much more to this. Christ certainly sat on the Throne of His glory when He ascended, and the regeneration certainly began with the sending forth of the Holy Spirit from that Throne (called “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” in Titus 3.5). But there is much yet to come. In fact in another place where Matthew refers to Christ sitting upon the throne of His glory, he says Christ will gather all nations before Him for judgment (Mt. 25.31,32). This obviously has not yet taken place. So, while I do see truth in the preterist viewpoint, I don’t fully hold to that view.]

I Took Thee From Following the Sheep

God told David the shepherd of Israel, “I took thee from the sheepecote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel” (2 Sam. 7.8).

From following the sheep? That's a novel concept in our day and age. What kind of leadership is this? Aren't the sheep supposed to follow the shepherd? But if you have ever watched a shepherd out with his flock, he is just there in the background keeping an eye on the sheep as they feed for themselves. The same with a true pastor of the flock of God. He "goes behind them," he lets them feed to their hearts' content in the green pastures of God. He lets them move along at their own rate. He just goes behind them, watching over them, watching for the lion and the bear.

You mean the pastor is not supposed to feed the flock? You miss my point. Yes, of course the shepherd feeds the sheep, shepherds them, leads them, guides them... protects them. Yes, the Shepherd "goeth before" the flock (Jn. 10.3). But oh, to see the kind of leadership revealed here! "I took thee from following the sheep..." Oh, for churches like this, for pastors like this, troubled about a kind of church order that keeps the sheep looking solely to one man week after week year in and year out... and never growing into a maturity that enables them to feed for themselves in the high pastures of Israel—the green pastures of living truth. The true shepherd will teach the sheep of the flock to recognize the Voice of their Shepherd for themselves, and follow *Him* as He leads them into those high pastures in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

Now mark—this is important. If the pastor, the shepherd, is watching over the flock to actually nurture this kind of liberty, the green pasture each one is feeding in will become the riches of the whole assembly. Let us switch metaphors now. What we are saying is that the body of Christ will actually become a functioning reality instead of an organization. For, when the Spirit of the Lord is given His liberty, *all the saints* will come into their own inheritance and find themselves vital functioning members of the body of Christ. How deeply we all need, and particularly the pastors, a transforming of our minds in this area—that we might come to the Mind of Christ and see what God longs to bring into being in the churches of God.

...And so, what we uncover from the Scriptures reveals an order entirely different from the structure we take so much for granted in our day as being God's order. It is not. It is church tradition not rooted in Scripture. There is no indication in the scriptural record that a number of churches were consolidated by a governing authority over them. Neither do we find individual churches headed up by a single pastor. The picture we get from Scripture is of an assembly with a few elders keeping an eye on things. Please take note of this; it is always a plurality of elders—not just one man at the helm. Paul says he left Titus in Crete "to set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city..." (Tit. 1.5). (There's another word, by the way, that has an

ecclesiastical overtone not there in the original—*ordain*. It should simply read *set in place*, or, *appoint*.) But notice this. Not, “*an* elder in every city,” but “elders (plural) in every city.” (Note also, by the way, that these appointments were not by democratic election; the only incident in the New Testament of something resembling majority election is the choosing of the apostle Matthias, and this was before the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost.) And then Paul goes on to describe the needed character for such men. “For *a bishop* must be blameless, as the steward of God...” Note again, it is the elders who are the bishops, the overseers of an assembly. This is clearly the scriptural pattern; Paul does not write to the *bishop* (singular) at Philippi, but “to the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the *bishops* (*overseers*, plural) and deacons” (Phil. 1.1).

The Place of Ministries in the Churches

Where then do the ministries fit in, the ministries God hath set *in* the church? “...First apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers... (1 Cor. 12.28). I believe that while functioning as members of the body of Christ in local assemblies (they may not necessarily be elders in that assembly: the apostle Paul himself ministered over two years in Ephesus, but does not appear to have been an elder there, for he called “the elders of the church” to him to Miletus), the ministries are God’s gifts to *all* the saints for their equipping, as I said earlier (Eph. 4.12). In Ephesians he gives them as “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (that is, shepherds) and teachers.”

I know we talk much of “the five-fold ministry.” But this is another of the long-established traditions of the church which the Bible does not back up. The Greek construction in Ephesians 4.12 clearly indicates that Paul considers pastors and teachers one ministry. It is the Greek *men/de* construction, *men* being the affirmative particle that introduces a sequence, with *de* being the adversative or distinctive particle introducing each subsequent member of the sequence (Thayer’s Lexicon). The same construction is found in Mt. 13.23, 1 Cor. 1.12, 1 Cor. 12.8-10, and 1 Cor. 15.39. So we have—and I will just give this very crudely, half in Greek and half in English—“*men* apostles, *de* prophets, *de* evangelists, and *de* shepherds and teachers.” If in Paul’s mind the teacher was a ministry separate from the pastor, *de* would also have preceded teachers as well as pastors. But the two are joined together with the conjunction *and*. If anything, then, this is the *four-fold* ministry Paul is setting forth. Perhaps they are the “four carpenters” (artisans) Zechariah prophesied would come from Babylon to build the house of God (Zech. 1.20,21).

From other scriptures we discover that pastoring and teaching are functions that are to characterize elders—the overseers of the assemblies. These are to “shepherd (to pastor) the flock of God, as we saw from 1 Peter 5.1-2. And they are to be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 2.2). So I would say that the shepherd/teacher ministry is more rooted in the local church than the other ministries are, although, it seems to me, certain of these are no doubt called to go out among other churches from time to time as well. They are gifts to the whole church. In any case, our Lord gave these ascension ministries for “the perfecting (the equipping) of the saints.” That is, the Head of the church, the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, sends these ones from His Throne, sends them out among the various churches from time to time to minister to the saints. He has one great purpose in mind: to to equip *the saints themselves* to minister to one another. It is ultimately *this* ministry, the effective ministry of each member of the body of Christ, that brings the whole body “unto a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4.13).

The thing is—and we emphasize this once again—while these ascension ministries were ministering in the early churches as the Lord led, it is clear that they never set up an overseeing type of organization. They ministered in different churches encouraging, exhorting, helping the saints in whatever way God had gifted them to do so, planting, or watering... and leaving the rest up to God, who giveth the increase. They understood the spiritual liberty God intended His churches to walk in, and trusted that the *Law* of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus would order all things far, far more effectively than any organization of man’s hands could ever do.

And so what we have in the Scriptural record is an account of a beautiful and simple order. Yes, God establishes leadership in His churches, and authority, and order. But oh, what a beautiful order it is—so different from man’s order. We don’t see this hierarchy thing, with one church ruling over other “satellite churches.” Nor do we find one man, or group of men, appointed over many churches. We don’t see a separate clergy in the churches. Nor one pastor running a church. We don’t find an apostle or prophet or teacher (or bishop) in one area set over the saints in another area. What we do see is a simple order of brethren gathered together, a few of whom guide that local flock. This is God’s desire—God’s will. Wherever His people are gathered it is His will—although perhaps not always possible if capable and mature brethren are lacking—that a few elders in the midst guide and help the others along the way. And the Lord of the church—do we not trust Him to care for His flocks?—will see to it that the sheep of His pasture are cared for. They have been commended to God, and the word of His grace, which is able to build them up and give them an inheritance

among them that are sanctified. Along with that He will send to them the ministries they need from time to time to foster their growth in grace. An apostle from time to time. A prophet. A teacher. Then at the Lord's leading the ministries move on elsewhere... some perhaps never to return again. Others for whom this assembly is home go out for a season, and come back again. Meanwhile are the saints bereft of needed help? No, they have *God*, and the word of His grace! The saints continue to draw near to the Him themselves—each one of them—and seek to be vital members of the body of Christ, each and every one of them ministering to the Lord, and to one another, according to the measure of grace given each one (Rom. 12.6). No doubt they might feel pretty weak at times. Wonderful. God's power is made perfect in weakness.

I've always liked a quote from the eighteenth century church historian Merle D'Aubigne that I came across in Frank Bartleman's book on Azusa Street. He said, "The church was in the beginning a community of brethren guided by a few of the brethren." How beautiful an insight—and how probing and challenging! That's the way it was in the beginning. And that's the way it needs to be again. This present order in which churches are run by a separate clergy is a departure from the pattern Scripture reveals. It is also a departure from the Scriptural pattern when such clergymen—whether apostles or prophets or whatever—come together in an organization they've fabricated supposedly for the furtherance of the kingdom of God in the earth. As I stated earlier, the clergy/laity distinction is not grounded in Scripture. It crept in during the second century. Edwin Hatch documented this. It is certainly not found in the New Testament; it was not the pattern of the primitive churches.

And so these nouveau organizations of apostles and prophets have no scriptural ground. They are just another method clergymen are using to secure their rule over the flocks of God. This is not God's order—God's kingdom order—as established by the early apostles. The nouveau apostles may call it kingdom order. But this kind of thing is not the kingdom of God. It is just a glaring imitation of the true Kingdom that was growing in the early church, a kingdom, an order, which is "not in word, but in power."

And right there we have exposed the root. When men manufacture these organizations it is an open acknowledgement that they do not have what the early church had—the power, the "demonstration of the Spirit," the reality of God in their midst. They don't have it, and giving themselves to God so utterly that He can return this order and this power is too demanding for them. So they set up an organization instead. That's far easier—and easier to control as well. It's more manageable by man. But going this route is an open admission that God

is not trusted, God's *way* is not trusted—men are mistrustful of surrendering themselves to the “weakness of God”—that is, to giving His Spirit total lordship over His own work, and simply walking in obedience, learning to be workers together with Him, as the early apostles were. Was that way too weak for them? Look at the great power and authority they walked in in this “weakness.” No doubt that's the very reason why they had the power and authority they had. Like Jacob of old they had been touched in the place of their carnal strength. They had been touched to the core of their being by the Life and by the Death of this One they had walked with... and who had come to them again in the Holy Spirit. And as a result they had power with God, and with men.

And they kept their hands off the Ark.

Where did the present order come from?

We Christians, we love our Bible... don't we? Don't we make it our claim that we go by the Bible? But do we? Look closer at the Blueprint, beloved. And then look closer at what men are trying to build in our day, and calling it *church*. Compare that to the Blueprint. Do they match up? Man's fingerprints are all over these organizations men are manufacturing in our day—including those that loudly proclaim they have moved beyond denominationalism.

And so it is cause for some deep-reaching questions, and great heart searching. Why is it that we who claim to love the Bible so much can get so involved in things that our beloved Bible clearly disowns? If the Bible stands witness against it, why this order so ingrained in our churches, this man-made order, this rule by man-made organization? Where did it come from?

As we showed earlier, this failure appeared on the church scene very early. Very early, and has stayed late, and has been a hindrance to true church ever since. *Hindrance*, I say, because, while God is obviously somewhat involved in this system, it is impossible for Him, thus confined, to reveal Himself in all His glory. For that is what the church is meant to be—the revelation of the glory of the Lord (Eph. 3.21).

Jesus in His great high-priestly prayer gives us His own vision as to the church—and to unity—which is, “that they all may be one, as Thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (Jn. 17.21). This is the quality of unity He has for His own—on an individual basis, and corporately as well. Nothing less than this! And He has the provision to bring it into being:

“And *the glory* which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved Me.”

Is He not glorified? Can we not trust Him to do this, then—to minister His ascension glory till His people become one? Can we not trust that it is actually by surrendering to His order, and letting local churches be autonomous, and seemingly disunited, seemingly scattered one from another... and seemingly unwallled and without defence, if I can use that imagery... that this high order of unity will come into being?

But no—how long, Lord?—here are these ones proclaiming they want to see a return to “kingdom order” and “apostolic Christianity,” and, all the while crying out against denominationalism, are setting up organizations cast in the same old brick molds on the plains of Shinar. How blind of men who lay claim to greater sight. What they are doing is certainly not the apostolic pattern as revealed in Scripture. What they are doing is not “apostolic reformation” at all. It is, in new guise, that same ancient spirit that built the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the beginning.

It is, once again, the carnal man trying to rule in the things of God. It is the uncrucified hand of man trying to accomplish what can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God. “Marvel not,” Jesus said, speaking of seeing—and entering—the kingdom of God, “ye *must* be born again.” Yes, all will agree that the kingdom of God is entered by the spiritual birth. But the kingdom of God is also a *Spirit-ruled* kingdom. We must be born of the Spirit, certainly. But then we must walk in the Spirit all our days! The Kingdom of God is the Way of the Wind. And so we must be born of the Wind, and must walk on the wings of the Wind. The kingdom of God is an order *of the Spirit*. Man’s ways, man’s hand, can have no place in it. “Governments” (1 Cor. 12.28) is as much a ministry of the Spirit as tongues, or gifts of healing. How is it that the Charismatics—those who make the gifts of the Spirit their boast—have not noticed this? Someone with gifts of healing knows perfectly he can produce no healing without the Spirit of God. But somehow there’s no thought that church government is to be just as miraculous a manifestation of the Spirit as gifts of healing.

Where did the present order come from? It is the result of that inherent tendency in the heart of man to have a king to rule over us, like the people of old in the days of Saul. Just set up a structured order, a principle of law and rule and regulation that tells us what to do—and that will be our order. It’s easier that way—easier for the carnal man,

that is. We don't have to walk in the Spirit ourselves, then. We don't have to hear God for ourselves. "Make us a king... that we may also be like the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8.5,20). I guess you can produce a pretty tight organization that way. Everyone will be in their proper place and you will be able to control it all. But what about the locusts, who have no king—yet go forth in bands? (Pr. 30.27). What kind of high order is that speaking of? What, no organization? No king? And yet they go forth *as one Man*? How awesome is that! Why is it we don't appreciate the beauty of this—and seek it? Why don't we long for this beautiful order of the Spirit, in which every single person is walking in such intimate relationship with Christ, and is hearing Him for themselves, that they function as one Man? Maybe it's because it's just easier to stay in the grave of the carnal nature. Drawing near to God for ourselves is just too demanding. As in Moses' day when the people urged him to draw near to God and then pass on to them what he heard—thus sparing them the cost of hearing Him for themselves, which would involve a sanctification they were unwilling to commit to.

Also this. Where did this kind of order come from? If we could recognize how persistently and malevolently the god of this world has resisted the true spiritual order, has sought time and again to defile it, to corrupt it, to thwart it, to bring it down, we would realize ourselves what he himself knows: that this One Thing means the utter demise of his kingdom and rule over men. For, this Order means the New Creation, means the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ *in the Spirit*—means the Lord Jesus Christ ruling as Head over all things *in the church*, means the Kingdom of the heavens ruling over all the earth—and himself cast out.

And further, it is a failure to understand the basic difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant—the Old Covenant principle of outward law, and rule, and regulation; and the New Covenant Law—the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus—that is being written in the hearts of those who have become a new creation.

I am sure I hear someone protesting that we need the order of law—creed, rules and regulations, the letter of church government—for the sake of the young and immature who have not attained the Spirit way. That is just an excuse justifying our own ambition... or sloth. What the young and immature need are elders who are walking in the Spirit way, the Way of the eagle in the air... and as such are men and women who are examples to the flock, and can nurture them and guide them into this Way, this awesome atmosphere, this realm of the Spirit... in which they can fly for themselves. In fact it's this carnal order of church government that has kept and continues to keep the immature in

a perpetual state of immaturity long, long after they ought to have grown to stature.

And so it is to our great sorrow and shame that the church has wholesale parted ways with the early pattern, the pattern of the Spirit, in which broken and chastened men of God gave the Spirit of Christ His lordship in the church. Too weak, you say? Too unstructured? Too risky? But in our effort to be strong, we have become utterly weak. Can we not recognize this? The world around us certainly recognizes it. Yet instead of falling on our faces and seeking the Lord and His Strength—the Ark of His Presence, I mean—we organize, we get a hierarchy headed up by a strong man that can keep a handle on things. And gone is the beautiful order of the Spirit that God meant to be the environment in which He would culture and grow His kingdom of priests to the maturity and stature He has longed to bring them to, so He can reveal Himself as He is in His many-faceted beauty, His power and His glory... to all Heaven and earth.

What are we to do, then? No doubt many will continue on with things as they are till God shakes it all to pieces. But increasing numbers these days are becoming unwilling to settle for things as they are. They are hungry for God. They want the *living* God, and His Law of the Spirit—not another effort by men to perpetuate a dying order that has been nothing more than a substitute for the church of the Living God.

A Warning

But we who hunger for this... at the same time, we must be on our watch lest we fall into the same pit we are seeking to get out of. Yes, we must know clearly what the simple early pattern of church was—as much as we have that pattern. But we must guard against settling for “the letter” of it, and missing The Life that made it all work. It is wonderful when we begin to see what the Bible actually has to say. But remember—what we have in the Bible is just the letter of the pattern that was given the early apostles “in the mount.” Just the letter. Trying to replicate the original pattern as we think we see it in the letter of the Scriptures, trying to copy that... it simply will not work.

In any case, our New Testament nowhere gives us a complete and definitive picture of the workings of the early church—and with good reason. Men would be chronically trying to replicate it in their own strength. As Lang said—and I will quote him more fully on this shortly—God has designed the church to be completely dysfunctional apart from Himself. God means church to be totally unworkable unless He Himself is present, and is free to order it as He sees fit. I know, it is an

astonishing idea. Surely God can't be serious. If we took that seriously we'd have to shut down thousands of churches. But it is no more astonishing than the idea of a body being able to function without a spirit.

How dependent we are upon Him, then—upon Jesus Christ the Son of the Living God. Only He can build His church! Sometimes you hear Christians zealously affirming that the Bible is the Blueprint. That is true, the Bible is the Blueprint for God's great building plan. And God is the Architect who drew up that Plan. How presumptuous, then, to build what is not His design as laid down in His Blueprint!

But—this is the thing—He Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ, He is not only the Architect, He is the Builder as well, who in His Holy Spirit is the on-site Foreman with the Blueprint in His hands! How dare we build, then, when it is not He Himself who is doing the building! God's leaders have a responsibility in this area—to be so in tune with the Foreman that what they are doing is the design and work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If the Lord of the church Himself is not doing the building, we are building in vain. We must be “workers together with Him.” Without Him, apart from Him, we can do *nothing*.

And if we disregard this admonition, it will mean sorrow for us in the Day when every man's work is revealed, and tried by fire. Church leaders must remember that if they have been given greater authority in the church, they are also subject to greater accountability (Jas. 3.1, Heb. 13.17).

What are we to do, then? First we must recognize, and acknowledge—oh for those who have the honesty and courage to do this—that we have missed God's Way! Oh, people of God, we have missed the Way—the Spirit Way! We are concerned for the lost? But it is we, the sheep of God's pasture, who are lost in this hour! We have lost our Way!

And it is largely the shepherds, those who lead the flocks, who are responsible for it! They say we need a return to apostolic order in the church. I believe that. I anticipate that. But what certain men are doing these days is not apostolic order. They like to be considered apostles. If they are apostles (this breaks my heart) why are they building what they are building? Why are they establishing this foreign order? When men are organizing apostolic alliances and coalitions of apostles, and are drawing up elaborate constitutions in an effort to govern the church and corral churches together in what they are calling apostolic reformation... we have *MISSED THE SPIRIT WAY* that the early apostles led God's people in.

Come, let us return to the Lord

I am speaking here to those who truly desire to see the glory of the Lord. Our answer is not in trying to replicate the pattern of early church, or in trying to accomplish the work of God with our own hands, but with honest repentance *returning to the Lord of the church*. If our cry is to see a return to the simplicity that is in Christ, and true apostolic order in the church, we must *TURN* to the Lord of the church with unveiled heart—and give the *Spirit* of the Lord His *lordship* in our midst! We are quick to acknowledge and recite that Jesus Christ is Lord. What about *this* statement? “*Now the Lord is the Spirit*” (2 Cor. 3.17). Do we believe this? That the same lordship of Jesus Christ at the right hand of the throne of Heaven is in the Holy Spirit in the earth? It is vain, then, for us to loudly proclaim “He is Lord, He is Lord,” if we are not giving *the Spirit of the Lord* His lordship! It is nothing more than flattery. If we mean what we are saying with our lips, we must give the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ His lordship in our midst in all we say and do.

Oh, for a cry like this to be birthed in the hearts of God’s leaders... and all of us! I realize there are many genuine men of God involved in the system we call church. It’s all they know—all they have been taught. There are many genuine pastors heading up single-pastor churches... doing their best to serve God in a long-established system which is all they know. I respect them. And I’m not saying this can all be changed overnight. But it must be changed... or we will not see the glory of the Lord. Do we not long to see His glory? But only in a spirit of deep repentance and great longing for God will we discover the secret of the beautiful order the early church walked in. **It was the Holy Spirit in them, the Spirit of LIFE sent from the Throne of Heaven... that was responsible for the beautiful order we read of. The way they gathered, the way they walked... it was all the outgrowth of The Life in them. They took the shape they took, gathered the way they gathered, because of The Life in them, that Eternal Life which had come forth from the Father, and had returned to the Father, and now in the Holy Spirit was seeking to come to full expression in them. Those early ones had learned to give the Spirit of Life His lordship in them... and in doing so He brought forth such a church as made kings tremble, and shook the world.**

In closing, I want to quote a few paragraphs from G.H. Lang’s book. Lang laments that He who is to be The Life of the churches is so chronically refused His rightful place by those in leadership. (Underlining is my own.)

“In the sphere of the assembly of God the spiritual man has regard first and always to a momentous but physically undiscoverable fact, even that the Lord the Spirit is personally present (1 Cor. 3.16), and, as reverence requires, is to be habitually owned, deferred to, and depended upon...

“Here is a primary clue to God’s methods. As is the power so is the machinery. The church of God in all its parts and working is intended for the manifesting of His invisible presence (1 Cor. 12.7). With intention it is so constructed as to be unworkable save as He is present, and is free to maintain and employ it. Evangelistic labour is not intended to be fruitful save as the Spirit of God is its power; public worship is meant to be a fiasco apart from His immediate impelling and restraining. It is notable how promptly forms and routines of worship are broken up in a time of genuinely Spirit-wrought revival, and how immediately the apostolic type of gathering revives. Nothing is so wholly edifying as such worship, nothing more profitless than the form without the life.

“But when the Holy Spirit is grieved, when failure appears and edification is ceasing, it is the changeless tendency of the human heart to resort to visible, material and mechanical measures in order to maintain a semblance of the real.

“...The Spirit of holiness being resisted, rules of conduct will not conserve spirituality, or even morality, for long; the Spirit of truth being rejected, creeds will not preserve the faith inviolate; the Spirit of God being restrained, forms of service will not compensate; ‘the body without the Spirit is dead’; the organism is now but an organization. If the coherent power of life is gone, the frame may be bound and moved by wires, but it is but a skeleton, however finely dressed.

“By this process the church steadily ceased to be a testimony to the existence, presence, and working of the living and true God. Less and less often did unbelievers coming into the assembly, and beholding in the spirit and unity and conscience-searching power of the worship, the evidences of His presence and control, exclaim: ‘God is among you indeed’ (1 Cor. 14.24,25). God was worshipped, but as absent; and presently the beauteous divine simplicity of the first days had been materialized into the lifeless magnificence of Roman ritual.

“The true remedy for decline is repentance for sin, shown by humiliation and fasting before the Lord, with steadfast and expectant trust in His mercy; beseeching that He will again take His own place in the assembly, and again reveal His own sufficiency along the line of His own appointed methods. To resort to non-apostolic organization is but to sin more deeply against Him, to depart more thoroughly from His ways, and so more surely to confirm the unspirituality and ineffectiveness of the church....”

...How convicting these words are!

...Lord Jesus Christ... we lay these words from one of your servants to heart—words that are commended to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. Let the honest heart weigh them before You, Lord.

...We remember the confrontation You granted Isaiah the prophet. He saw *Your glory*, Lord—saw You sitting upon a Throne high and lifted up, and *Your train*—that which flows from You—*filled the Temple*.

Leaving room for *nothing else* in that Temple!

Oh, how full the Temple is with the ways and works of man in our day! Oh for a visitation like this! Oh that the builders in our day—I cry for this myself—Oh that we might *see You*, and in seeing You, see our great need in this hour! Oh, to come face to face with You the Temple-Builder, and see the uncleanness of the works of our own hands... and of the words of our lips... and come to repentance, and be touched by that *Living Coal*... and cry out, “Here am I! *Send me!*”

Then, Lord Jesus Christ—and only then—we will see the church that the gates of Hell cannot prevail against... and the whole earth filled with Your glory. Amen.

Allan Halton
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