Today's Church Practices

Are They

Tradition or Scripture?

Randolph Dunn

International Bible Knowledge Institute

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Randolph Dunn, President

Roberto Santiago, Dean

Contact with us: info.IBKI.english@gmail.com

Website: www.thebibleway.net

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Introduction

Perhaps most of us have heard statements such as "The Worship Service" was dull, boring, impractical, and irrelevant, orchestrated and doesn't meet my needs. They have become frustrated and apathetic while others are satisfied.

Since the resurrection of Christ many "learned men / Bible Scholars" have translated and interpreted the available manuscripts of the Gospels and Epistles. For years the kings and religious leaders allowed only a select few to have access to them. As years passed several earlier manuscripts were discovered producing different translations, mistranslations and biased interpretations.

The teachings and practices presented in this booklet are the personal understandings, interpretations, by the authors which include disagreements between them as to meanings. The compiler does not endorse their opinions but presents them for comparison to the Bible, evaluation and interpretation based upon personal understanding of the scriptures.

Interpretations of teachings are not facts as is the Gospel. Therefore, differing interpretations can be held. An open mind is needed to examine interpretations and practices, to measure them against the Bible.

Is My Church Really A New Testament Church?"
Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up?
Pagan Christianity? Exploring The Roots Of Our Church Practices
Where Did The Christian Sermon Come From?
Concerns about House/ Small Churches

Note; Page references (xx) refer to the books page number while subscripts y refers to footnotes within chapters. My comments are identified as (rd).

Is My Church Really A New Testament Church?

In his paper Darryl M. Erkel states: "Many churches claim to base all that they do upon the New Testament, but the sad fact is that most churches claiming to be "evangelical" practice very little of what the Scriptures have patterned for local assemblies." Consider his following questions:

1. The New Testament teaches that the local church is to be pastored and taught by a plurality of scripturally qualified men known as elders (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

   This being true, why are most of our churches only pastored by one man (i.e., "the pastor")? Why do so many churches today divide their leadership into a hierarchy of "senior pastor," "associate pastor," and "board of elders" - particularly when the New Testament makes no such distinctions among congregational leaders?

2. The New Testament teaches that church shepherds are to arise from the church's own rank and assembly (Acts 14:23; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5).

   This being true, why do our churches always look for potential pastors outside of their present congregations? Why aren't our churches raising and training their own men for pastoral leadership? Is our current practice of forming a "pastoral search committee" based on Scripture or the traditions of men?

3. The New Testament teaches that the congregational meeting is to be a place where Christians exercise their spiritual gifts and encourage one another to love and good deeds (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-14; 14:12,26; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

   This being true, why do most of us not say or do anything within the church service? Why is coming to church primarily a spectator event instead of a participating event? Why have we placed our responsibility of mutual edification and ministry into the hands of professional clergymen?

4. The New Testament teaches that the local church is to be edified and ministered to by all the members present - "for the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:14; cf. 14:12,26-31; Ephesians 4:16).

   This being true, why do our church services focus on only one part of the body (i.e., "the pastor")? Where, in the New Testament, is it taught that one's man ministry or sermon is to be the focal-point of church gatherings?

5. The New Testament teaches that every Christian is a minister [*diakonos* (rd)] and priest before God (1Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6).

   This being true, why do we continue to make such distinctions as "clergy" and "laity"? On what scriptural basis do we divide the body of Christ into two classes of people: "clergy" and "laity"? Moreover, if every Christian is a minister, why are we not allowed to minister to one another within the church service?

6. The New Testament records examples where the Lord's Supper was a full-on meal within the context of

joyous, brotherly fellowship (Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 10:16-22; 11:18-34).

This being true, why have we turned the Lord's Supper into an elaborate and even mystical ritual? Why is our current practice of the Lord's Supper more like a funeral than a festival? Why do we believe that only the "ordained" clergy have the right to "administer the sacraments" when the New Testament does not teach this?

7. Jesus taught that His people were not to give or take upon themselves honorific titles which set them apart from the rest of the Christian brotherhood (Matthew 23:6-12; Mark 10:35-45).

   This being true, why do so many church leaders today give themselves such lofty titles as "Reverend," "Minister," "Bishop," "Pastor," "Senior Pastor" [or "Brother" (rd)]? Why do they feel it necessary to preface their names with such titles - particularly when the New Testament forbids it?

8. The New Testament teaches that Christians are to practice hospitality towards both fellow believers and outsiders (Matthew 25:34-40; Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 6:18; Titus 3:8, 14; Hebrews 13:2; 1 Peter 4:9).

   This being true, why do most of us rarely open our homes to others? Why do so many Christians ignore the physical needs of one another? Why is hospitality a forgotten virtue in most churches? With such an evident lack of love and concern towards others, is it any wonder why so many of our churches are cold and dying? [But, hospitality is not restricted to something occurring in one's home. (rd)]

9. The early church met almost exclusively in homes as opposed to large, religious edifices (Acts 20:20; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon v.2; 2 John v.10). [The practice of meeting in homes was not commanded and may have been all that was available. (rd)]

   This being true, why do we feel it necessary to spend large sums of the Lord's money on church buildings and cathedrals which might only be used once or twice a week? Is this being a good steward of the financial resources which God provides? Why do so many churches have a larger budget for building projects, staff salaries, and maintenance than for missions, the poor, and people-oriented ministries? What does this reveal about our priorities?

Erkel concludes: "The truth is, we have inherited traditions and practices within our churches which simply have no basis in the New Testament. Sadly, most of us have never bothered to question or investigate these traditions. But if we are to see genuine church renewal, we must rethink this whole thing called "church" and seek to conform all that we say and do in light of New Testament patterns and principles. [Letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation of the Apostle John lets us know that not all patterns and practices of the early churches should be followed. (rd)]

"Are you ready for the challenge and willing to "put everything to the test and hold fast to that which is true" (1 Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Acts 17:11)? . . . There is a better way!" (www.5solas.org/media.php?id=82)

Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up?

David Bercot in Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up? Third Edition, 1989, Scroll Publishing, Amberson, PA examines some teachings in the New Testament that first century Christians believed and practiced. He states "Early Christianity was a revolution that swept through the ancient world like a fire through dry timber. It was a counterculture movement that challenged the pivotal institutions of Roman society. As Tertullian wrote: "Our contest lies against the institutions of our ancestors, against the authority of tradition, against man-made laws, against the reasonings of the worldly wise, against antiquity and against customs." 1 (pg. 25)

Some distinguishing marks of the early faithful followers were:

a. Separation from the world
b. Unconditional love
c. Obedient trust (pg. 15)

"How strange it is, therefore, that the modern evangelical church claims that the Christians of the first few centuries were merely teaching and practicing the culture of the day. That is particularly ironic since the Romans bitterly criticized the Christians for just the opposite - for not following the culture norms of the day." (pg. 25)

Many Christians today appear no different than conservative non-Christians except they attend church regularly. For instance, they:

a. Watch the same entertainment.
b. Are concerned about the same problems of the world.
c. Are just as involved in the world's materialistic pursuits. (pg. 16)

Most of the cultural issues facing the twentieth - century Christians are the very same issues that faced the early church.

a. Divorce
b. Abortion
c. High fashion - low modesty
d. R-rated entertainment
e. Evolution theories
f. Inequality of persons
g. Role of women in religion (pgs. 26-38)

"First century Christians had a completely different set of principles and values as they rejected entertainment, honors and riches as they considered themselves to be sojourners in this world." (pg. 17) "Their lifestyle was their primary means of witnessing." (pg. 39)

The testimony (witnessing) and lifestyle of the early Christians was an absolute surrender made possible by:

1. The supportive role of the church
   The church [those put into Christ by God (rd)] is those with whom you constantly associated, who held the same values and attitude and who always encouraged and edified you to remain faithful. They were a disciplined body but they did not attempt to legislate or regulate righteousness. Instead they relied upon sound teaching, example and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. (pg. 42) Converts must change from within by changing their heart not complying to some rigid requirement. (pg. 43)

   Their leaders called overseers, sentinels, guardians, elders and pastors (shepherds) were from within their local assembly. Their strengths and weaknesses were known by all. These men taught by word and example even before assuming the function of guiding and leading. (pg. 45) Their sole concern was the spiritual well-being of each person within their congregation. In fact, they may have spent their full time performing this most important function. If so, they were probably supported on the same basis as that of the widows and orphans.[9] (pg. 47)

2. The message of the cross - Their most powerful means of evangelizing was their endurance of suffering and death because they refused to deny Christ. (pg.49) Clement wrote that to the average Christian, "The cross might be represented by enduring marriage to an unbelieving spouse, obeying unbelieving parents, or suffering as a slave under a pagan master. All of those situations could entail much emotion and physical suffering; they were rather mild form of the cross for anyone who had already committed himself to endure torture and death for Christ (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 12:11)." (pg. 50)

3. The belief that obedience was a joint venture between man and God - Initially, a new Christian walks closely with God depending on His power. But as time passes, they often begin to pull away from that dependency. (pg. 52) Martin Luther taught that one is totally incapable of doing any good by one's self and that both desire and power to obey God came from Him alone.[15] Early Christians believed just the opposite. Origen wrote "He [God] makes himself known to those who, after doing all that their power will allow, confesses that they need help from Him.[17] (pg. 53) ["I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil. 4:13) (rd)] It is not a onetime request but a continual process. Putting to death our fleshly way is going to hurt, and if we aren't willing to suffer internally, wrestling with our sins, then God isn't going to supply the power (Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 9:27).20 (pg. 54) One can easily avoid the pain and suffering if they wish to do so, by denying Christ. But one will endure it by putting their trust in God.21 (pg. 55)

Early Christian writings contradicted my theological beliefs so states David Bercot. He identifies five and provides evidence:

1. What They Believed About Salvation

a. Are we saved by faith alone?
   We have been told that "after Constantine corrupted the church, it gradually began to teach that works play a role in our salvation. Fairly typical of the scenario painted is the following passage from Francis Schaeffer's How Should We Live Then? After describing the fall of the Roman Empire and the decline of learning in the west, Scheaffer wrote, 'Thanks to the monks, the Bible was preserved - along with sections of Greek and Latin classics…. Nevertheless, the pristine Christianity set forth in the New Testament gradually became distorted. A Humanistic element was added: Increasingly, the authority of the church took precedence over the teaching of the Bible. And there was an ever-growing emphasis on salvation as resting on man's meriting the merit of Christ, instead of on Christ's work alone.'[1]

   "Like Schaeffer, most evangelical writers give the impression that the belief that our own merits and works affect our salvation was something that gradually crept into the church after the time of Constantine and the fall of Rome. But that's not really the case.

   "The early Christians universally believed that works or [and (rd)] obedience play an essential role in our salvation?" (pg 57) Polycarp wrote "He who raised Him up from the dead will also raise us up -

if we do his will and walk in His commandments." (pg. 58) Clement of Alexander wrote, "Whoever obtains [the truth] and distinguishes himself in good works shall gain the prize of everlasting life." Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian and Lactantius all wrote summarily. (pg. 59)

b. Does This Mean That Christians Earn Their Salvation By Works?

No, the early Christians did not teach that we earn salvation by the accumulation of good works. (pg. 60) For instance: Clement of Rome - "[We] are neither justified by ourselves, nor by our wisdom, understanding godliness or works done in holiness of heart; but by that faith through which almighty God has justified all men since the beginning." So also do Polycarp, Barnabas, Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexander state about the same. (pg. 61)

c. Are Faith and Works Mutually Exclusively?

No, but "Augustine, Luther and other western theologians have convinced us there's an irreconcilable conflict between salvation based on grace and salvation conditioned on works or obedience. They have used a fallacious form of argumentation known as 'false dilemma,' by asserting that there are only two possibilities regarding salvation: it's either (1) a gift from God or (2) it's something we earn by our works. The early Christians would have replied that a gift is no less a gift simply because it's conditioned on obedience." (pg. 62)

The early Christians believed that salvation is a gift from God but God gives His gift to whomever He chooses. He chooses to give it to those who love, trust and obey Him. (pg. 62)

Simply because a person is selective in his giving, it doesn't change the gift to a wage. (pg. 62)

d. Yes, But the Bible Says …

- Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21
- He who endures to the end will be saved. (Matt. 24:13)
- All who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:28, 29)
- Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. (Rev. 22:12)
- Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Tim. 4:16)

So, the real issue is not a matter of believing the Scriptures, but one of interpreting the Scripture. The Bible says that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, least anyone should boast." (Eph. 2:8, 9) And yet the Bible also says, "You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24) Our [Christendom in general but specifically Bercot's church] doctrine of salvation accepts that first statement but essentially nullifies the second. The early Christian doctrine of salvation gives equal weight to both. Also, the early Christians didn't believe that man is totally depraved and incapable of doing any good. (pg. 64)

e. Can A Saved Person Be Lost?

Since the early Christians believed that our continued faith and obedience are necessary for salvation, it naturally follows that they believed that a "saved" person could still end up being lost. (pg. 65)

Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 225) wrote, "Some people act as though God were under an obligation to bestow even on the unworthy His intended gift. They turn His liberality into slavery…. For do not many afterwards fall out of grace? Is not this gift taken away from many."[23] Cyprian told his fellow believers; "It is written, 'He who endures to the end, the same shall be saved.' [Matt. 10:22] (pg. 65)

One of the scriptures cited is Hebrews 10:26: "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left."

f. The Group That Preached Salvation By Grace Alone

There was a group, the Gnostics, who taught that man was totally depraved and that works play no role in our salvation. They claimed that God had revealed special knowledge to them that the main body of Christians did not have. They believed that God, the creator, was an inferior God, a different God than God the father of Jesus. Therefore, man was created by an inferior God who botched things up and man is inherently depraved as a result. Since man was inherently depraved, God the Son

could not have actually become a man. He only took on the appearance of man. [Meaning if He was flesh and blood, He would have not been sinless. (rd)] (pg. 66)

The Apostle John said: "Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (2 John 7) The Gnostics were the ones who denied that Christ had come in the flesh. (pg. 67)

2. What They Believed About Predestination and Free will

a. Believers in Free Will

The early Christians were strong believers in free will. For example, Justin Martyr made this argument to the Romans: "We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true that punishment, chastisements and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's action. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our power. For if it is predestined that one man be good or the other to be evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions.[2] (pg. 70) These sentiments are echoed by Clement3, Archelaus4, and Methodis5. (pg. 71)

Early Christians based their beliefs upon:

- For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [unique, one and only (rd)], that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)
- The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)
- The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:17)
- This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

b. But Doesn't The Bible Say …?

- Choose life that you may live.
- Salvation does not depend on man's desire or effort.
- God does not want any to perish but to come to repentance.
- God has mercy upon whom He wills. (pg. 73)

The early Church believed there will be a just judgment by God but it is our responsibility to live righteously. So, consider:

- He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)
- See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws. (Deuteronomy 30:15-16)
- Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance [a lifestyle change]? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. (Romans 2:4-8)
- There is significant difference between foreseeing something and causing it. (pg. 76)

3. What Baptism Meant To The Early Christians

Jesus' statement to Nicodemus that one must be born of water and spirit was universally understood by early Christians to refer to water baptism [Gr. *baptizo* -to immerse. (rd)]. (pg. 77) Irenaeus wrote "This class of men [Gnostics who said humans cannot be reborn or regenerated through water baptism] have been instigated by Satan to a denial of the baptism which is regeneration to God.[1] (pg. 77)

Early Christians associated three very important matters with water baptism and since this washing was completely independent of any merit on the baptized person's part, baptism was frequently referred to as "grace." (pg. 78)

a. Remission of sins - based upon the following:
   - And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name. (Acts 22:16)

- He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)
- Peter relating Christian baptism to Noah and the flood stated - Water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 3:21-22)
- "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)
- The New Birth - Based upon Jesus' words to Nicodemus, the early Christians also believed water baptism was the channel through which a person was born again. Irenaeus mentioned this in a discussion on baptism, "As we are lepers in sin, we are made clean from our old transgressions by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord. We are thus spiritually regenerated as newborn infants, even as the Lord has declared: 'Except a man be born again through water and the spirit, he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.'"[3] (John 3:5) (pg. 79)
- Spiritual Illumination - They believed that the newly-baptized person, after receiving the Holy Spirit had a clearer vision of spiritual matters.
- Baptism Was Not An Empty Ritual - Baptism was the supernatural rite of initiation by which a new believer passed from being the old man of the flesh to being a newly reborn man of the spirit. They did not separate baptism from faith and repentance. They specifically taught that God was under no necessity to grant forgiveness of sins simply because a person went through the motions of baptism.[6] (pg. 80)
- Were Unbaptized Persons Automatically Damned? - The early Christians believed that God would do what was loving and just toward pagans who had never had the opportunity to hear about Christ.
- The Evangelical Rite Of Passage - Generally we evangelicals have rejected the historical ceremony of the baptismal rebirth and have developed our own special ceremony - the altar call. When Peter was asked "What Shall we do?" he did not say come down front and invite Jesus into your heart. No, he told them "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized into the name [authority (rd)] of Jesus for the remission of sins. Acts 2:38 "Actually, the altar calls and associated prayers are a product of the revival movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. " (pg. 82) [Refer to TBibleWay lesson Baptism into Christ]

4. Prosperity: A Blessing Or A Snare

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all thing and be in health, just as your soul prospers. (3 John 2) Was John promising them riches and health from God, the health and wealth gospel? The following are some other passages from the Bible. (pg. 84)

- For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:10)
- Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have. (Hebrews 13:5)
- Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)
- No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (Matthew 6:24)
- But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. (1 Timothy 6:8-9)
    a. The Dangers of Prosperity - Hermes (prior to 150 AD) wrote: "These are those who have faith indeed, but also have riches of this world. When tribulation comes, they deny the Lord on account of their riches and business…. As a result, those who are rich in this world cannot be useful to the Lord unless their riches are first cut down."[3] (pg. 85) [But God does not demand poverty neither does He condemn wealth. He condemns the desire or love of wealth. Paul in Ephesians 4 advises Christians to work to have to give to others. (rd)] But how can a person out give God? If wealth is from God, a Christian can't lose it by obeying God's Word and sharing his wealth with the poor. (pg. 87)
    b. What A Contrast Between Their Message And Today's Message Today the gospel of prosperity states "The Lord continued, 'You say, Satan, take your hands off my money!' because it's Satan who is keeping it from coming to you - not Me."10 (pg.88)

c. Did Christians Enjoy Better Health - Letters written by early Christians testify they suffered from the same plagues and calamities as the rest of mankind. (pg. 89)

5. Is Old Testament Morality Still Good Enough?

John Calvin taught emphatically that there was little difference between the two [morality of the Old and New Testaments (rd)].[1] (pg. 91) However, the understanding of the early Christians was that the moral teachings of Christ surpassed the moral teachings of the Old Testament as the teachings of Christ went to the spiritual meaning. (pg. 92)

The author raises several questions

a. What Did Jesus mean when He Said "Do Not Swear"? [Originally swearing meant calling upon God to attest to or verify statements one had made. Today it appears to mean "Is what you are about to say completely the truth? The statement "As God is my witness" appears to convey the original meaning of swearing. (rd)]
b. Is War Morally Wrong? [God used and probably still uses nations to produce situations in which His will can be accomplished. (rd)]
c. How Should A Christian View Capital Punishment?
[God ordained government to bring order from chaos. (rd)]

Pagan Christianity? Exploring The Roots Of Our Church Practices,

Frank Viola and George Barna studied some writings during the first three centuries to see if they could provide and insight into teachings and practices of the first century Christians. In their book Pagan Christianity? Exploring The Roots Of Our Church Practices, 1998, Tyndale House Publishing, Inc. they set forth charges that today's practices are in conflict with Biblical teachings and first century practices.

"It's time that the body of Christ get in touch with both the Word of God and the history of the church to arrive at a better understanding of what we can and should do as well as what we cannot and should not do." (Introduction pg. xxvii) [Caution should be exercised in relying on history as it often reflects erroneous practices and teachings rather than the truth. (rd)]

Pagan Christianity? charges that a great number of activities and practices of the churches of today are in conflict with biblical practices and teachings. They also charge that by using the proof texting method, scripture is taken out of context to support a teaching and/or practice. The areas being challenged are:

- Church Buildings
- Order of Worship
- Worship
- Pastor
- Sunday Morning Costumes
- Ministers of Music
- Tithing and Clergy Salaries
- Baptism
- Lord's Supper
- Christian Education
- Approach to Understanding the New Testament

[Note: These charges cannot be blindly accepted or rejected neither can our current church practices. Therefore, scriptures used by the author supporting his charges must be kept the context, analyzed, including the determination of audience to whom written, the problems being addressed and discussed with other Christians. Keep mind open. Be aware of personal traditions in our interpretation. Hold any suggested changes, if any, until all analysis is completed. Then review as a total package. (rd)]

Church Buildings

"Ancient Judaism was centered on three elements: The Temple, the priesthood and the sacrifice. When Christ came, He ended all three by fulfilling them in Himself. He is the temple who embodies a new and living house made of living stones - "without hands." He is the priest who has established a new priesthood. He is the perfect and finished sacrifice.[1] Consequently, the Temple, the professional priesthood, and the sacrifices of Judaism all passed away with the coming of Jesus Christ.[2]. Christ was the fulfillment and the reality of it all.[3] It can be rightly said that Christianity was the first non-temple-based religion to ever emerge. According to footnote 6 Arthur Wallis in The Radical Christian, on page 83 he wrote "In the Old Testament, God had a sanctuary for His people, in the New, God has His people as a sanctuary." (pg. 10-11)

After the destruction of Jerusalem Jewish Christians waned and Gentile Christians with their pagan backgrounds become more prominent.

Clement of Alexander [united Greek philosophical traditions with Christian doctrine (Wikipedia/wiki/clement_of_alexander and wiki/platoism) was the first person to use the phrase "go to church."[9] However, Christians did not erect special buildings for worship until the Constantinian era in the fourth century.[12] (pg.12)

When Christianity was born, it was the only religion on the planet that had no sacred objects, no sacred persons and no sacred spaces.18 The Christianity that conquered

the Roman Empire was essentially a home-centered movement.[22] Worship, therefore is not spatially located, nor extracted from the totality of life. Biblically speaking, Christians 'holy place' is as omnipresent as their ascended Lord. Worship is not something that happens in a certain place at a certain time. (refer to John 4) It is a lifestyle. Worship happens in spirit and reality inside God's people, for that is where God lives today. [footnote 17 See J. G. Davis, The Secular use of Church Buildings, 3-4] (pg. 14)

In the second and third centuries a shift occurred. The Christians began to adopt the pagan view of reverencing the dead.[30] Their burial places were later viewed as "holy space" resulting in the building of small monuments and shrines to honor their dead. (pg. 15-16)

Prior to Constantine granting them freedom from persecution, Christians were a small despised minority. But the Roman Empire was divided between pagans and Christians and Constantine needed to unite it. [In an attempt to unite it, he established a state church and began merging Christian and pagan doctrines by renaming pagan practices with Christian names. (rd)] He also began the construction of church buildings. So, if Christians had their sacred buildings as did the Jews and the pagans, their faith would be regarded as legitimate." (pg. 18) [This feeling is current today. Thus, by focusing on buildings we may distract from Christ. (rd)]

Constantine's church buildings were spacious and magnificent modeled after the basilica (common government buildings designed after pagan temples).[80] They were wonderful for seating passive and docile crowds to watch a performance. This was one of the reasons Constantine chose the basilica model.[85] The basilica also allowed the sun to fall upon the speaker when he faced the congregation.[86] (pg. 22)

The Christian basilica had an elevated platform with an altar and bishop's chair, the cathedra or throne.[94] This chair replaced the seat of judgment of the Roman basilica.[95] Therefore power and authority rested with the chair. From this seat the bishop delivered his sermon.[97] (pg. 23) The chair or pulpit elevated the clergy to a position of prominence thus placing him high and above the other of God's people. Then the pew inhibited face to face fellowship, ushering in or becoming a symbol of lethargy and passivity making corporate worship a spectator sport.[175] (pg. 34)

The advent of the church building brought significant changes to the Christian worship:

a. Rituals of the imperial court were incorporated into the liturgy.
b. Candles appeared following the practice of carrying candles before the emperor's entrance.
c. Burning of incense when clergy entered room.
d. Special robes patterned after those of Roman government officials.
e. Processional music for the beginning of services by choirs.
f. Professional clergy performed the "worship service" replacing open participation and intimacy of all worshippers.

As one Catholic scholar wrote, with the coming of Constantine "various customs of ancient Roman culture flowed into the Christian liturgy … even the ceremonies involved in ancient worship of the emperor as a deity found their way into the church's worship, only in their secularized form.[109] (pg. 24-25) With the advent of church buildings with elevated or raised floor, significance is added to one function over others. By inhibiting fellowship worship begins to become non-participatory. Therefore, an activity done in a specific place and removed from everyday life. (pg. 38) [The Bible is silent on the assembly facility: its arrangement, size or ownership. (rd)]

Order of Worship

The meeting of the early church was marked by spontaneity, freedom, every-member functioning, vibrancy and open participation. (pg. 50)

Consider:

- 1 Corinthians 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.
- 1 Corinthians 12:18 God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.
- 1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.
- 1 Corinthians 12:31 But eagerly desire the greater gifts.
- 1 Corinthians 13:13-14:1 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:12 Try to excel in gifts that build up the church, [the assembled Christians (rd)].

Paul discussing activities of the assembled church states "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue [a language foreign to either the speaker or hearer therefore in need of translation. (rd)] or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two - or at the most three - should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church

and speak to himself and God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14:26-33)

So, what are the points he is making?

- When you come together Assembled Corinth Christians
- Christian men and women have total participation
  - a hymn >
  - a word of instruction >> different activities based on
  - a revelation >> individual functions, gifts.
  - a tongue or an interpretation >

Today's church practice has revised the assembly into two parts:

a. Bible study where women are allowed to speak
b. Worship Service where they are not allowed to speak
   - All of these must be done for the strengthening of those assembled.
   - Let us not give up [abandon, forsake (rd)] meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Peel away the superficial alterations that make each protestant church service distinct you will find essentially the same liturgy [a prescribed order (rd)] but not necessarily in the same order: (pg. 48-50)

- The greeting as one enters the building
- Prayer and / or scripture reading
- Song service
- Announcements
- Offering
- Sermon
- Benediction

So, where did the protestant order of worship originate?

1. It has its roots in the medieval Catholic Mass[9] which incorporated

a. Vestments of pagan priest
b. Use of incense and holy water in purification rites
c. Burning of candles in worship
d. Architecture of the Roman basilica
e. Law of Rome as the basis of "canon law"
f. Title of Pontifex Maximus for the head bishop
g. Pagan rituals for the Mass[17] (pg. 53)

2. Luther railed against the miters and staffs of the Roman Catholic leadership and its teaching on the Eucharist. Therefore, he made preaching, rather than the Eucharist, the center of the gathering.[26] "A Christian congregation should never gather together without preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how brief" … "the preaching and teaching of God's Word is the most important part of Divine service."[29] (pg. 53)

The major changes that Luther made to the Catholic Mass [Eucharistic or Lord's Supper (rd)] were:

a. Performed in language of the people
b. Gave sermon the central part
c. Introduced [returned to (rd)] congregational singing
d. Abolished the idea that the Mass was a sacrifice of Christ
e. Allowed congregation to partake of bread and cup, rather than just the priest. (pg. 55)

3. Calvin did away with the pipe organ and choirs as they were not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament.[64] (pg.58)

4. Puritan Calvinists forsake the clerical vestments, icons, and ornaments.[86] The sermon reached its zenith in the American puritans. They also punished by putting in stocks and fined members who missed the Sunday morning sermon.[88, 89] (pg. 63)

5. The Methodists popularized the Sunday evening worship.[98] (pg. 64)

6. The Frontier-Revivalists changed the goal of preaching to evangelist sermons.[101] (pg.65)

7. The Methodists and the Frontier Revivalists gave birth to the "altar call." [112] (pg. 66) Referred to as the "anxious bench" by Charles Finny.[113] The most lasting element of Finley was pragmatism if something works, it should be embraced regardless of ethical considerations.[112] (pg. 67) Or, "the ends justifies the means." (pg.68) American Frontier-Revivalism turned the church into a preaching station and reduced the assembly experience of edification into an evangelistic mission.[125] It created pulpit personalities as the dominating attraction for the church. As a result mutual edification of every-member functioning to corporately manifest Jesus Christ before principalities and powers was lost.[127] (pg. 69)

8. D. L. Moody in the late 1800's introduced the "sinner's prayer"[136] and Billy Graham updated Moody's technique some fifty years later.[137] (pg. 70)

9. Beginning in 1906 the Pentecostal movement introduced the lifting of hands, dancing in pews, hand clapping, speaking in tongues [not some known language but gibberish (rd)] and the use of tambourines. (pg. 72)

Therefore, the protestant order of worship is: (pg. 73-77)

a. Officiated and directed by a clergyman.
b. The sermon was made the center of a worship service that was highly predictable, perfunctory and mechanical, and with no spontaneity.
c. Mutual edification with participation by members was repressed therefore became silent.
d. Passive liturgy with its limited functions implies the putting in an hour per week is the key to victorious Christian life.

The Sermon

By the removal of the sermon, the attendance at the Sunday morning service is doomed to drop as the sermon is the bedrock of the protestant liturgy. (pg. 85) It actually detracts from the purpose for which God designed the church to gather and has very little to do with genuine spiritual growth. (pg. 86-87)

a. It is a regular occurrence - once every week.
b. It is delivered by the same person - professional speaker.
c. It is delivered to a passive audience - a monologue, or lecture.
d. It is a cultivated form of speech - a specific structure around 3 to 5 points.

In contrast the apostles' preaching was: (pg. 88)

a. Sporadic.
b. Delivered on special occasions to deal with specific problems.
c. Extemporaneous without rhetorical structure.
d. In a dialogue form with questioning and interruptions from the audience.

The earliest record of Christian source of regular sermonizing is found during the second century.[14] Clement of Alexander lamented the fact that sermons did so little to change Christians.[15] (pg. 89)

The headwaters of the sermon goes back to the wandering teachers, called sophists, of the fifth-century BC. They were expert debaters using emotional appeals. Physical appearance and clever language to "sell" their arguments.[18] This spawned a class of men who became masters of fine phrases, "cultivating style for styles sake." They were experts at imitating form rather than substance.[20] Sophists were identified by special clothing, had a fixed residence where they gave regular sermons to the same audience and earned a good deal of money. (pg.89)

About a century later Aristotle gave to rhetoric the three-point speech.[22] Orators could bring a crowd to a frenzy by their powerful speaking skills.[27]

The Greek sermon type found its way into the Christian church around the third century…open meetings begin to die out, and church gatherings became more and more liturgical [rites prescribed for a religious service or public worship (rd)] developing into a "service."[30] Thus the pagan notion of a trained professional speaker who delivers orations for a fee moved straight into the Christian bloodstream. (pg. 91) This new style emphasized polished rhetoric, sophisticated grammar, flowery eloquence, and monologue. (pg. 92)

This type of teaching or preaching has had a negative impact on the church:

a. It makes the preacher the virtuoso performer.
b. It encourages passivity thus suffocating mutual ministry and open participation meetings of members.
c. It preserves the clergy even if not called such.
d. It de-skills the saints.
e. It produces impractical lessons.

The Pastor

Remove the present-day pastor/leader and Protestantism as we know it would die. He is the embodiment of Protestant Christianity the dominating focal point, mainstay, and centerpiece of the contemporary church. The profound irony is that there is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that supports such. However, pastor is biblical. (pg.106-7) Observe:

Ephesians 4:11 "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" is the only verse where pastor is used. [This Greek word for pastor, *poiména*, is translated as shepherd within the same context of leader of the type mentioned in Ephesians in 1 Peter 2:25. (rd)]

a. The word is plural.
b. It means shepherd(s) a metaphor describing function.[4]

   First century shepherds (pastors) were local elders (presbyters) and overseers (guardians, sentinels) of the church. Their function is at odds with the contemporary pastoral role[9] [in most protestant churches. (pg. 108)

The seeds of the contemporary pastor can even be detected in the New Testament era. Diotrephes, who "love[d] to have the preeminence" in the church (3 John 9-10).[12] (pg. 109)

Up until the third century, the church had no official leadership. That it had leaders is without dispute. But leadership was unofficial in the sense that there were no religious "offices" or sociological slots to fill.[13]

They were religious groups without priest, temple or sacrifice.[14] (pg. 109-110) [Leadership was / is a function not a position. (Refer to TheBibleWay lesson Functions of God's Shepherds (rd)]

Ignatius of Antioch (35-107) was instrumental in the shift toward a single leader. He elevated one of the elders in each church above all others. The elevated elder was then called the bishop [a word for overseer (rd)].[20] (pg. 110-111) Ignatius thought this was necessary to remedy false doctrine and establish church unity.[27] (pg. 112)

The bishop eventually became the main administrator and distributor of the church's wealth.[13] In effect he became the solo pastor of the church - the professional in common worship (their spokesperson).[36] (pg.112)

Clement of Rome, who died in about 100, is credited with making a distinction between leaders and non-leaders, laity[38] with Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 225) being the first to use clergy.[40] (pg. 113-114)

After the Council of Nicaea (325) bishops delegated the responsibility of the Lord's Supper to the presbyters, deputy bishops.[53] (pg. 114)

Cyprian of Carthage [third century] argued for an unbroken succession of the bishops that traced back to Peter.[60] (pg. 115)

By the fourth century, the church followed the example of the Roman Empire. Emperor Constantine organized the church into dioceses [dioceses "a governor's jurisdiction" www.etymonline.com (rd)] along the pattern of the Roman regional districts. Later Pope Gregory shaped the ministry of the entire church after Roman law.[81] (pg. 119)

Constantine gave the bishop of Rome more power than he gave Roman governors. They had the prestige of church office bearers, a favored class, power of a wealthy elite and more of a career than a calling.[99] The net result was alarming: (pg. 120-121)

The clergy/laity gap widened as the clergy were the trained leaders, guardians of orthodoxy - the rulers and teachers of the people. They possessed gifts and graces not available to lesser mortals. The laity were second-class, untrained Christians.[103] (pg. 122) This gave way to the ordination of a spiritually elite group of "holy men."[108] By the fourth century the ordination ceremony was embellished by symbolic garments and solemn rituals.[120] This process used the very same words from the Roman civil world.[121] (pg. 123-125)

- The unscriptural clergy/laity distinction has done untold harm to the body of Christ. (pg.136-137) It divided Christians into first and second-class Christians. It suffocated individual functioning and made ineffectual the teaching that every member has both the right and the privilege to minister in church meetings. The pastor/preacher position rivals the functioning headship of Christ in His church.[188]
- The present-day pastor was born out of the single-bishop rule first spawned by Ignatius and Cyprian, evolving into the local presbyter, which in the Middle Ages grew into the Catholic priest. During the Reformation he was transformed from priest into "the preacher," "the minister," and finally "the pastor." (pg. 141)

" The Catholic priests had seven duties at the time of the Reformation.[208] The protestant pastor takes upon himself all of these responsibilities plus he sometimes blesses civic events. These duties were/are: (pg141)

1. Preaching
2. Sacraments
3. Prayers for the flock
4. A disciplined godly life
5. Church rites
6. Supporting the poor
7. Visiting the sick

Sunday Morning Costume

Every Sunday morning, millions of Protestants throughout the world put on their best clothes to attend Sunday Morning Church.[1] Originally dressing up for any occasion was only an option for the wealthiest nobility. This changed with the invention of mass textile manufacturing and the development of urban society.[6] Fine clothes became more affordable to common people. The middle class was born and they began to emulate the envied aristocracy.[7] (pg. 148) Their pastors distinguished their importance by their special clothing.
However, the dressing up represents: (pg. 148-150)

a. A division between the secular and the sacred.
b. The illusion that we are good because of our attire, thereby possibly covering up less than godly lives.
c. Differences in social and/or racial classes.
d. A false delusion that one is "irreverent" by wearing informal clothing [not wearing our very best (rd)].

[Note: James 2:1-2 warns about an attitude of feeling superior to others, partiality and looking down upon the poor and "less fortunate." (rd)]

It was Clement of Alexander who argued that clergy should wear better garments than laity.[26] (pg. 150) The official Roman dress was gradually adopted by the priest and deacons following Constantine's move to Constantinople. [29] Jerome (ca. 342-420) remarked that the clergy should never enter into the sanctuary wearing everyday garments.[34] (pg. 151) By the Middle Ages, their clothing had acquired mystical and symbolic meanings.[37] (pg. 152)

The Reformers adopted the scholar's black gown, also known as the philosopher's cloak.[43] So prevalent was the new clerical garb that the black gown of the secular scholar became the garment of the Protestant pastor.[44] (pg. 152)

All this special clothing clearly distinguishes the two classes: professional and nonprofessional perhaps even discriminating against the nonprofessional. (pg. 154)

Ministers of Music

During Constantine's reign, choirs were developed and trained to help celebrate the Eucharist. This practice was borrowed from Roman custom, which began its imperial ceremonies with professional music.[2] However, the root is found in pagan Greek temples and Greek drama.[3] (pg. 158-159)

With the advent of the choir in the Christian church, singing was no longer done by all of God's people but by the clerical staff composed of trained singers.[5] This shift was partly due to the fact that heretical doctrines were spread through hymn singing. The clergy felt that if singing of hymns was in their control, it would curb the heresy.6 This also increased the power of the clergy. (pg. 159) [Do the songs sung today promote non-biblical teachings? (rd)]

Luther encouraged congregational singing during parts of the service.[28] (pg. 162)

In many contemporary churches, charismatic or non-charismatic, the choir has been replaced by the praise team.[50] (pg. 164)

Listen to Paul's description of a New Testament church meeting: (pg. 166)

a. Every one of you hath a song. (1 Corinthians 14:26)
b. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. (Ephesians 5:19)

Consider the words "Every one of you." Song leaders, choirs and worship teams make it impossible by limiting the leadership of Christ - specifically of leading His brethren into singing praise songs to His Father. (pg. 166-167)

When worship songs can only be announced, initiated, and led by the talented, this element of service becomes more like entertainment than corporate worship.[17] And only those who "make the cut" are allowed to participate in the ministry of leading songs. (pg. 167) [It is what is pleasing to the attendees rather what is pleasing to God from the attendees. (rd)]

Tithing and Clergy Salaries

Tithing does appear in the Bible. So, yes, tithing is biblical. But it is not Christian. The tithe belongs to ancient Israel. It was essentially their income tax. Never in the New Testament or during the first century do you find Christians tithing. (pg. 172) With the death of Jesus, all ceremonial codes that belonged to the Jews were nailed to Christ's cross and buried, never to be used again to condemn us. [He came not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them Matthew 5:17 (rd)] We see the first-century Christians as stewards giving cheerfully according to their ability - not dutifully out of a command.[7] Giving in the early church was voluntary.[8] And those who benefited from it were the poor, sick, orphans, widows, prisoners, strangers and church planters. [9] (pg. 173) [If a Christian must tithe because commanded, then his gift is not voluntary, not according to his ability and not from his heart but because of duty. Thus, by giving his tithe one earns his reward, salvation. (rd)]

In the third century, Cyprian of Carthage was the first Christian writer to mention the practice of financially supporting clergy. He urged that just as the Levites were supported by the tithe, so should the Christian clergy.[16] (pg.176) By the end of the tenth century, the tithe had developed into a legal requirement to fund the state church - demanded by the clergy and enforced by the secular authorities![28] (pg. 177 So far as clergy salaries go, ministers were unsalaried for the first three centuries. But when Constantine appeared, he instituted the practice of paying a fixed salary to the clergy from church funds and municipal and imperial treasuries.[30] Thus was born the clergy salary. (pg. 178)

Giving salaries to pastors elevates them above the rest of people. It creates a clerical caste that turns the living body of Christ into a business. Since "the pastor" and his staff are compensated for ministry, they are paid professionals and the rest of the church lapses into a state of passive dependence. If all Christians got in touch with the call that lies within them to be functioning priest in the Lord's house, why would we be paying our pastor? In addition, paying a pastor encourages him to be a man pleaser. (pg. 180-181)

Baptism

Most evangelical Christians believe in and practice believer's baptism as opposed to infant baptism. Likewise, most Protestants believe in the practice of baptism by immersion or pouring rather than sprinkling.[2] [Baptism is from the Greek word *baptizo*, transliterated as baptism, a dipping, plunging, or immersing, the Greek word for sprinkling is *rantizo* and the Greek word for pouring is *cheo* (rd] In the first century, water baptism was the way someone came to the Lord.[6] For this reason, the confession and baptism are vitally linked to the exercise of saving faith. So much so that the New Testament writers often use baptism in place of the word faith and link it to being "saved."[7] That is because baptism was the early Christians initial confession of faith in Christ. (pg. 188-189) [David Bercot stated "baptism was frequently referred to as "grace." (rd]]

In our day [in some perhaps most churches (rd)] the "sinner's prayer" has often replaced the role of water baptism. Unbelievers are told, "Say this prayer after me, accept Jesus as your personal savior, and you will be saved." But nowhere in all the New Testament do we find any person being led to the Lord by a sinner's prayer. And there is not the faintest whisper in the Bible about a "personal" Savior. Put another way water baptism was the sinner's prayer in century one! Baptism accompanied the acceptance of the gospel and it occurred immediately. (pg. 189) [Peter in 1 Peter 3:21stated that baptism now saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ as one calls upon God to forgive him of his sins. (rd)]

Baptism marked a complete break with the past and a full entrance into Christ and His church. Baptism was simultaneously and act of faith as well as an expression of faith.[8] (pg. 189)

Beginning in the second century some influential Christians taught that baptism must be preceded by a period of instruction, prayer and fasting.[9] You must show yourself worthy of baptism by your conduct.[11] [Such was not the case on Pentecost as their baptism appears to have been immediate. (rd)]

> Tradition has removed the true meaning and power behind water baptism. Properly conceived and practiced water baptism is the believer's confession of faith before men, demons, angels and God. Baptism is a visible sign that depicts our separation from the world,[47] our death with Christ, the burial of our old man,[48] the death of the old creation,[49] and the washing of the Word of God. To replace the New Testament water baptism with the sinner's prayer is to deplete baptism of its God given testimony. (pg. 196) [The old or fleshly man (sinful man) believed Christ and His message, died to his sinful way of life, was buried ***** in water (immersion or baptism). He was cleansed of sin, resurrected as a new living spiritual being and put onto Christ's body, the church, by God by his belief, faith, trust and obedience. (rd)]
>
> * { Greek *sunthapto* (*sun* with + *thapto* entomb) - to bury with, or together (Vine's Expository Dictionary) – so one is buried and united with Christ in His death.}

Lord's Supper

For early Christians, the Lord's Supper was a communal meal.[22] The mood was one of celebration and joy. When believers first gathered for the meal, they broke bread and passed it around. Then they ate their meal, which was concluded after the cup was passed around. The Lord's Supper was essentially a banquet. And there was no clergy to officiate.[31] Because of Paul's statement warning about unworthiness in 1 Corinthians 11:27-33 some began to teach the Lord's Supper was dangerous. Apparently, they did not relate the warning to discriminating against the poor and becoming drunk as the unworthy part. (pg. 192)

Around the time of Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 225), the bread and the cup began to be separated from the meal.[25] With the abandonment of the meal, the terms breaking of bread and Lord's Supper was replaced with the Greek word Eucharist.[30] Irenaeus (130-200) began referring to it as an "offering"[31] or "sacrifice." An altar table where the bread and cup were placed and came to be seen as the place where the victim was offered.[32] The Supper was no longer a community event. It was rather a priestly ritual that was to be watched at a distance. Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries, there was an increasing sense of awe and dread.[33] (pg. 194)

With the doctrine of transubstantiation, God's people approached the elements with a feeling of fear. They were reluctant even to approach them.[43] When the words of the Eucharist were spoken by the priest it was believed that the bread literally became God[44] [actually became flesh and blood (rd)]. (pg. 195) In the New Testament itself, there is no indication that it was the special privilege or duty of anyone to lead the worshipping fellowship of the Lord's Supper.[52] (pg. 197)

Christian Education

In the mind of most Christians, formal education qualifies a person to do the Lord's work. Unless a Christian has graduated from a Bible college or seminary, he or she is viewed as a being "para" minister, a pseudo Christian worker. Such a person cannot preach, teach, baptize or administer the Lord's Supper since he or she has not been formally trained to do such things …right? (pg. 199-200)

Christian training during the first century was hands-on, rather than academic. It was a matter of apprenticeship, rather than intellectual learning. It was aimed at the spirit, rather than the front lobe i.e.:

They learned the essential lessons by living a shared life with a group of Christians under the tutelage of an older, seasoned worker.

Therefore, the best structure for equipping every Christian is already in place. It predates seminaries and weekend seminars and will outlast them all. They learned in the furnace of life, in a rational, living, working and ministering context.[2] (pg. 200)

There have been four stages of theological education: (pg. 201-206)

a. Episcopal - Theology in the patristic age (third to fifth centuries) was episcopal because the leading theologians of the day were bishops.6
b. Monastic - The monastic stage of theological education was tied to the ascetic and mystical life. It was taught by monks living in monastic communities and at a time the Eastern church fathers became steeped in Platonic thought. For example, Justin Martyr believed that philosophy was God's revelation to the Gentiles.[10]
c. Scholastic - The third stage of theological education owes much to the culture of the university.[33] Abelard (1079-1142) applied Aristotelian logic to reveal the truth.[34] Martin Luther (1483-1546) said "What else are the universities than places for training youth in Greek glory."[37]
d. Seminarian - Seminary theology grew out of the scholastic theology taught in the universities which were based upon Aristotle's philosophical system.[39] Aquinas probably had the greatest influence. His main thesis was that God is known through human reason and he preferred the intellect to the heart as the organ for arriving at truth.[41]

Reason and intellect can cause us to know about God and help us communicate what we know. But they fall short in giving us spiritual revelation. The intellect is not the gateway for knowing the Lord deeply. Neither are the emotions.[43] A high powered intellect and razor-sharp reasoning skills do not automatically produce spiritual men and women. Blasie Pascal (1623-1662) once stated "It is the heart which perceives God, and not the reason."[45] (pg. 206) [One must have an intimate relationship with God. (rd)]

The Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates taught that knowledge is virtue. Good depends on the extent of one's knowledge. Hence, the teaching of knowledge is the teaching of virtue.[99] Herein lies the root and stem of contemporary education. It is built on the Platonic idea that knowledge is equivalent of moral character. [Gnosticism (rd)]

Contemporary theological teaching is data-transfer education. It moves from notebook to notebook. In the process, our theology rarely gets below the neck. If a student accurately parrots the ideas of his professor, he is awarded a degree. Therefore, the fallacy is that graduates are instantly qualified[36] even though he has little if any hands-on experience in the body of life. Perhaps the most damaging problem of the seminary and Bible college is that they perpetuate the humanly devised system in which the clergy live, breathe and have their being.[109] (pg. 216-218)

Re-approaching the New Testament

The church is influenced by its surrounding culture, seemingly unaware of its negative influences. Because of his training and education, we tend to accept whatever the pastor's or preacher's state as biblical.

Therefore, we generally do not consider it necessary to go to the Bible in an attempt to determine the validity of his statements as that is what "I have always heard." When we do study we commonly use the "proof text method," which dates back to the 1590's. A group of men called Protestant scholastics took the teachings of the Reformers and systemized then according to the rules of Aristotelian logic.[2] They held that not only is the scripture the word of God, but every part of it is the Word of God in and of itself - irrespective of context. (pg. 222-223)

Two-thirds of the New Testament is made up of Paul's letters. In the early second century when they were compiled into a volume they were arranged in order of lengthiest to shortest. Then when compiling the New Testament, the gospels and Acts were placed in front of Paul's letters and Revelation at the end. (pg. 226) In 1227 a professor in the University of Paris divided the books of the Bible into chapters. It wasn't until 1551 that sentences were numbered.11 (pg. 228-229)

Christians have been taught to approach the Bible generally in one of eight ways by looking for verses that will:

a. inspire you.
b. tell you what God has promised so you can confess it in faith therefore, obligating God to do what you want.
c. tell you what God commands you to do.
d. Allow you can quote to scare the devil out of his wits or resist him in the hour of temptation.
e. prove your particular doctrine so you can slice and dice your theological sparring partner.
f. control or correct others.
g. "preach" well and make good "sermon" material.
h. appear when flipping randomly.

These methods do not provide opportunity to know the context of the passage and to be able to determine the message the writer is attempting to deliver. The context is so important that without it one may draw an opposite conclusion that the one intended. (pg. 230)

Jesus, the Revolutionary

The early Christians were intensely Christ-centered. Jesus Christ was their pulse beat. He was their life, their breath, and their central point reference. He was the object of their worship, the subject of their songs, and the content of their discussion and vocabulary. They made the Lord Jesus Christ central and supreme in all things.[6] (pg. 247-249)

- The New Testament church
  a. Had no fixed order [liturgy (rd)] of worship.
  b. Gathered in open-participatory meetings.
  c. Had no one as a spectator [except possibly visitors (rd)].
- The purpose of their assembling was:
  a. Mutual edification. [encourage faithfulness to Christ. (rd)]
  b. To make visible the Lord in every functioning of His body.
  c. Not a religious "service."
  d. An atmosphere of freedom, spontaneity and joy.
  e. Not to serve as a platform for any one's particular ministry.
- The New Testament church lived as a face-to-face community.
- Christianity was the first and only religion the world has ever known that was void of ritual, clergy and sacred buildings. For the first 300 years of the church's existence, Christians gathered in homes. On special occasions they would sometimes use a larger facility (like Solomon's Porch).
- The church did not have a clergy.
- Decision making of the church fell upon the shoulders of the whole assembly.
- It was organic not organizational. They were not welded together by putting people into offices, creating programs, constructing rituals, and developing a top-down hierarchy or chain-of-command structure. The church was a living and breathing organism.
- Tithing was not practiced but they gave according to their ability in order to help their poor and church planters.
- Baptism was a burial in water (immersion) which occurred immediately following one's death to sin. [Peter stated in 1 Peter 3:21 "baptism now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience - through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (rd)]
- They did not construct buildings.
- Training was on the job by a mature seasoned Christian. [Apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11) [Refer to BibleWay lesson Servants of Christ]
- They were not divided into denominations. All were in Christ by dying to sin, being buried by immersion in water, being resurrected by God into a new living spiritual creation and put into Christ Body. [Refer to BibleWay lesson United in Christ]

Conclusions and Recommendations

The early Christian writers, often referred to as "church fathers", quoted by the authors and the authors of the listed sources used in this booklet were not inspired as were the writers of the New Testament. Some writer's doctrinal positions on certain issues often contradict interpretations of other writers of the same period and are not generally held to be in keeping with the scriptures. In fact, some writers referred to certain doctrines and beliefs as heretical. This said, their writings provide valuable information of practices in some churches during the first few centuries and the farther removed from the apostles the greater the possibility of erroneous teachings and practices.

Many, if not most, of the charges of Pagan Christianity? **may** appear to be valid to an individual. Before they are accepted as true, they **must be verified** with statements from the Bible taken in context.

1. Following individual study each issue or charge presented herein should be studied in small group studies where each participant can question or challenge the conclusion of others. Should the group agree that an issue or charge is valid, then the study should be expanded to larger groups for additional questioning and challenges. This should provide a clearer and more accurate understanding and will also help remove the appearance of forcing change upon the uninformed brothers and sisters.

2. Before replacing any practice that has been concluded to be contrary to scripture, a specified time should be set aside and a process established for the resolution of difference of misunderstandings, opinions or conflicts. Every Christian brother or sister should have the opportunity to study, question or even challenge any or all conclusions in an environment of love. Then it should be implemented slowly in the event the conclusion is proven to have been faulty.

3. Changes should not be made just for change sake.

In a recent study the Barna Group released Who is Active in Group Expressions of Faith in which they explored

profiles of Americans who actively participate in their faith. The study provides the following insights:

1. 53% of church goers are women [50.7% of US population].
2. 56% of home church participants are men.
3. 67% of church goers are married.
4. 50% of home church goers are men thus 50% are women.
5. 56% of church goers are 45 years old or older (the national population is 52%); 44% were 18 to 44.
6. The average age in the home churches was 56 and they were least likely to include parents of younger children.
7. Northeasterns were unlikely to be active in small groups.
8. Westerners had the largest share of home church participants.
9. Southerners were the least common to have house church participants but made up ½ of the small group attendees.
10. Only 6% of Catholics attend house churches.
11. Evangelistic protestants were the largest participants.
12. 26 to 30% of blacks were participants in small groups and house churches (average national black population is 13%).
13. 67% of church goers read the Bible outside "church services."
14. 84% of house church participants read the Bible outside "church services."
15. In generally simple churches, house churches and small group attendees are more active and study/read the Bible and seek to:
    a. Identify the living presence of Christ and His Word.
    b. Develop healthy relationship of love for one another
    c. Go into the world and make disciples for their good and God's glory

Simple Church Concerns

Within all activities of the simple and house churches there are or should be concerns of

a. remaining true to teaching of Christ and the apostles.
b. dissolving or continuing of traditional institutional churches
    1. It would encourage people to leave the traditional church.
    2. Many seminaries and Bible Colleges would close.
    3. Our sanctuaries would need to be padlocked.
    4. Many pastors would be fired.
    5. Cultism, heresies and abuses would not be controlled.
    6. Leadership would disappear.
    7. Conflicting opinions would arise.
    8. Lay leaders are not qualified for the care of others.
    9. Charismatic leaders would dominate meetings.
    10. The average of house churches is 6 months so how will Christianity survive.
    11. The unchurched and visitors would be unable to locate the church since no phone book listing.
    12. They have sold out to a culture that sinfully refuses to "Go to Church."
    13. They promote the worship of the individual and individualism.
    14. They have retrenched to a private world of faith.
    15. Orthodoxy would not be maintained
    16. Wild theologies would become prevalent.
    17. Sermons and formal Bible classes would disappear resulting in uneducated believers.

wikipedia.org/wiki/simple_church

Where did the Christian Sermon Come From?

We come to one of the most sacrosanct church practices of all: the sermon. Remove the sermon and the Protestant order of worship becomes in large part a songfest. Remove the sermon and attendance at the Sunday morning service is doomed to drop.

The sermon is the bedrock of the Protestant liturgy. For five hundred years, it has functioned like clock-work. Every Sunday morning, the pastor steps up to his pulpit and delivers an inspirational oration to a passive, pew-warming audience.

So central is the sermon that it is the very reason many Christians go to church. In fact, the entire service is often judged by the quality of the sermon. Ask a person how church was last Sunday and you will most likely get a description of the message. In short, the contemporary Christian mind-set often equates the sermon with Sunday morning worship. But it does not end there.

Remove the sermon and you have eliminated the most important source of spiritual nourishment for countless numbers of believers (so it is thought). Yet the stunning reality is that today's sermon has no root in Scripture. Rather, it was borrowed from pagan culture, nursed and adopted into the Christian faith. But there is more.

The sermon actually detracts from the very purpose for which YAHUAH designed the assembly gathering. And it has very little to do with genuine spiritual growth.

The Sermon And The Bible

Doubtlessly, someone reading the previous few paragraphs will retort: "People preached all throughout the Bible. Of course, the sermon is scriptural!" Granted, the

Scriptures do record men and women preaching. However, there is a world of difference between the Spirit-inspired preaching and teaching described in the Scripture and the contemporary sermon. This difference is virtually always overlooked because we have been unwittingly conditioned to read our modern-day practices back into the Scripture. So, we mistakenly embrace today's pulpiteerism as being biblical. Let's unfold that a bit. The present-day Christian sermon has the following features:

- It is a regular occurrence-delivered faithfully from the pulpit at least once a week.
- It is delivered by the same person-most typically the pastor or an ordained guest speaker.
- It is delivered to a passive audience-essentially it is a monologue. It is a cultivated form of speech-possessing a specific structure. It typically contains an introduction, three to five points, and a conclusion.

Contrast this with the kind of preaching mentioned in the Bible. In the Tanach (Old Testament), men of YAHUAH preached and taught. But their speaking did not map to the contemporary sermon. Here are the features of Tanach preaching and teaching:

- Active participation by the audience were common.
- Prophets and priests spoke extemporaneously and out of a present burden, rather than from a set script.
- There is no indication that the Tanach prophets or priests gave regular speeches to YAHUAH's people. Instead, the nature of Tanach preaching was sporadic, fluid, and open for audience participation.

Come now to the renewed Covenant (New Testament). The Master Yahushua did not preach a regular sermon to the same audience. His preaching and teaching took many different forms. And He delivered His messages to many different audiences. (Of course, He concentrated most of His teaching on His disciples. Yet the messages He brought to them were consistently spontaneous and informal.)

Following the same pattern, the apostolic preaching recorded in Acts possessed the following features:

- It was sporadic.
- It was delivered on special occasions in order to deal with specific problems.
- It was extemporaneous and without rhetorical structure.
- It was most often dialogical (meaning it included feedback and interruptions from the audience) rather than monological (a one-way discourse).

In like manner, the renewed Covenant (New Testament) letters show that the ministry of YAHUAH's Word came from the entire assembly in their regular gatherings." From Romans 12:6-8, 15:14, 1 Corinthians 14:26, and Colossians 3:16, we see that it included teaching, exhortation, prophecy, singing and admonishment. This "every-member" functioning was also conversational (1 Corinthians 14:29) and marked by interruptions (1 Corinthians 14:30). Equally so, the exhortations of the local elders were normally impromptu.

In short, the contemporary sermon delivered for Christian consumption is foreign to both the Tanakh (Old Testament) and the renewed Covenant (New Testament). There is nothing in Scripture to indicate its existence in the early Messianic gatherings."

The spontaneous and non-rhetorical character of the apostolic messages delivered in Acts is evident upon close inspection. See for instance Acts 2:14-35, 7:1-53, 17:22-34.

The earliest recorded Christian source for regular sermonizing is found during the late second century. Clement of Alexandria lamented the fact that sermons did so little to change Christians.

Yet despite its recognized failure, the sermon became a standard practice among believers by the fourth century.

This raises a thorny question. If the first-century Christians were not noted for their sermonizing, from whom did the post apostolic Christians pick it up? The answer is telling: The Christian sermon was borrowed from the pagan pool of Greek culture!

To find the headwaters of the sermon, we must go back to the fifth century BC and a group of wandering teachers called sophists. The sophists are credited for inventing rhetoric (the art of persuasive speaking). They recruited disciples and demanded payment for delivering their orations.

The sophists were expert debaters. They were masters at using emotional appeals, physical appearance, and clever language to "sell" their arguments. In time, the style, form, and oratorical skill of the sophists became more prized than their accuracy. This spawned a class of men who became masters of fine phrases, "cultivating style for style's sake." The truths they preached were abstract rather than truths that were practiced in their own lives. They were experts at imitating form rather than substance.

The sophists identified themselves by the special clothing they wore. Some of them had a fixed residence where they gave regular sermons to the same audience. Others

traveled to deliver their polished orations. (They made a good deal of money when they did.)

The first recorded Christian sermon is contained in the so-called Second Letter of Clement dated between AD 100 and AD 150.

We get our words sophistry and sophistical from the sophists. Sophistry refers to specious and fallacious (bogus) reasoning used to persuade (Soccio, Archetypes of Wisdom, [57]). The Greeks celebrated the orator's style and form over the accuracy of the content of his sermon. Thus, a good orator could use his sermon to sway his audience to believe what he knew to be false. To the Greek mind, winning an argument was a greater virtue than distilling truth. Unfortunately, an element of sophistry has never left the Christian fold.

Sometimes the Greek orator would enter his speaking forum "already robed in his pulpit-gown." He would then mount the steps to his professional chair to sit before he brought his sermon.

To make his points, he would quote Homer's verses. (Some orators studied Homer so well that they could repeat him by heart.) So spellbinding was the sophist that he would often incite his audience to clap their hands during his discourse. If his speaking was very well received, some would call his sermon "inspired."

The sophists were the most distinguished men of their time. Some even lived at public expense. Others had public statues erected in their honor. About a century later, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322BC) gave to rhetoric the three-point speech. "A whole," said Aristotle, "must have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

In time, Greek orators implemented Aristotle's three-point principle into their discourses. The Greeks were intoxicated with rhetoric.' So, the sophists fared well. When the Romans took over Greece, they too became obsessed with rhetoric. Consequently, Greco-Roman culture developed an insatiable appetite for hearing someone give an eloquent oration. This was so fashionable that a "sermonette" from a professional philosopher after dinner was a regular form of entertainment.

The ancient Greeks and Romans viewed rhetoric as one of the greatest forms of art. Accordingly, the orators in the Roman Empire were lauded with the same glamorous status that Americans assign to movie stars and professional athletes. They were the shining stars of their day. Orators could bring a crowd to a frenzy simply by their powerful speaking skills. Teachers of rhetoric, the leading science of the era, were the pride of every major city." The orators they produced were given celebrity status. In short, the Greeks and Romans were addicted to the pagan sermon-just as many contemporary Christians are addicted to the "Christian" sermon.

The Arrival Of Another Polluted Stream

Around the third century a vacuum was created when mutual ministry faded from the body of Christ." At this time the last of the traveling Christian workers who spoke out of a prophetic burden and spontaneous conviction left the pages of church history. To fill their absence, the clergy began to emerge. Open meetings began to die out, and church gatherings became more and more liturgical. The "assembly meeting" was devolving into a "service."

As a hierarchical structure began to take root, the idea of a "religious specialist" emerged. In the face of these changes, the functioning Christians had trouble fitting into this evolving ecclesiastical structure.' There was no place for them to exercise their gifts. By the fourth century, the church had become fully institutionalized.

As this was happening, many pagan orators and philosophers were becoming Christians. As a result, pagan philosophical ideas unwittingly made their way into the Christian community. Many of these men became the theologians and leaders of the early Christian church. They are known as the "church fathers," and some of their writings are still with us.

Thus, the pagan notion of a trained professional speaker who delivers orations for a fee moved straight into the Christian bloodstream. Note that the concept of the "paid teaching specialist" came from Greece, not Hebrew. It was the custom of Hebrew teachers to take up a trade so as to not charge a fee for their teaching.

The upshot of the story is that these former pagan orators (now turned Christian) began to use their Greco-Roman oratorical skills for Christian purposes. They would sit in their official chair and expound the sacred text of Scripture, just as the sophist would supply an exegesis of the near sacred text of Homer. If you compare a third century pagan sermon with a sermon given by one of the church fathers, you will find both the structure and the phraseology to be quite similar.

So, a new style of communication was being birthed in the Christian church-a style that emphasized polished rhetoric, sophisticated grammar, flowery eloquence, and monologue. It was a style that was designed to entertain and show off the speaker's oratorical skills. It was Greco-Roman rhetoric. And only those who were trained in it were allowed to address the assembly! (Does any of this

sound familiar?) One scholar put it this way: "The original proclamation of the Christian message was a two-way conversation . . . but when the oratorical schools of the Western world laid hold of the Christian message, they made Christian preaching something vastly different. Oratory tended to take the place of conversation. The greatness of the orator took the place of the astounding event of Yahushua Moshiach. And the dialogue between speaker and listener faded into a monologue.

In a word, the Greco-Roman sermon replaced prophesying, open sharing, and Spirit-inspired teaching. The sermon became the elitist privilege of church officials, particularly the bishops. Such people had to be educated in the schools of rhetoric to learn how to speak. Without this education, a Christian was not permitted to address God's people. As early as the third century, Christians called their sermons homilies, the same term Greek orators used for their discourses. Today, one can take a seminary course called homiletics to learn how to preach. Homiletics is considered a "science, applying rules of rhetoric, which go back to Greece and Rome.

Put another way, neither homilies (sermons) nor homiletics (the art of sermonizing) have a Christian origin. They were stolen from the pagans. Another polluted stream made its entrance into the Christian faith and muddied its waters. And that stream flows just as strongly today as it did in the fourth century.

Chrysostom And Augustine

John Chrysostom was one of the greatest Christian orators of his day. (Chrysostom means "golden-mouthed.") Never had Constantinople heard "sermons so powerful, brilliant, and frank" as those preached by Chrysostom. Chrysostom's preaching was so compelling that people would sometimes shove their way toward the front to hear him better.

Naturally endowed with the orator's gift of gab, Chrysostom learned how to speak under the leading sophist of the fourth century, Libanius. On his deathbed, Libanius (Chrysostom's pagan tutor) said that he would have been his worthiest successor "if the Christians had not stolen him" (Hatch, Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages, [109]).

So powerful were his orations that his sermons would often get interrupted by congregational applause. Chrysostom once gave a sermon condemning the applause as unfitting in God's house. But the congregation loved the sermon so much that after he finished preaching, they applauded anyway. This story illustrates the untamable power of Greek rhetoric.

We can credit both Chrysostom and Augustine (354-430), a former professor of rhetoric, for making pulpit oratory part and parcel of the Christian faith." In Chrysostom, the Greek sermon reached its zenith. The Greek sermon style indulged in rhetorical brilliance, the quoting of poems, and focused on impressing the audience. Chrysostom emphasized that "the preacher must toil long on his sermons in order to gain the power of eloquence."

In Augustine, the Latin sermon reached its heights. The Latin sermon style was more down to earth than the Greek style. It focused on the "common man" and was directed to a simpler moral point. Zwingli took John Chrysostom as his model in preaching, while Luther took Augustine as his model." Both Latin and Greek styles included a verse-by-verse commentary form as well as a paraphrasing form. Even so, Chrysostom and Augustine stood in the lineage of the Greek sophists. They gave us polished Christian rhetoric. They gave us the "Christian" sermon: biblical in content, but Greek in style."

How Sermonizing Harms The Church

Though revered for five centuries, the conventional sermon has negatively impacted the church in a number of ways.

First, the sermon makes the preacher the virtuoso performer of the regular church gathering. As a result, congregational participation is hampered at best and precluded at worst. The sermon turns the church into a preaching station. The congregation degenerates into a group of muted spectators who watch a performance. There is no room for interrupting or questioning the preacher while he is delivering his discourse. The sermon freezes and imprisons the functioning of the body of Christ. It fosters a docile priesthood by allowing pulpiteers to dominate the church gathering week after week.

Second, the sermon often stalemates spiritual growth. Because it is a one-way affair, it encourages passivity. The sermon prevents the church from functioning as intended. It suffocates mutual ministry. It smothers open participation. This causes the spiritual growth of YAHUAH's people to take a further nose dive.

As Christians, they must function if they are to mature (see Mark 4:24-25 and Hebrews 10:24-25). No one grows by passive listening week after week. In fact, one of the goals of the New Testament teaching is to get each member to function (Ephesians4:11-16). It is to encourage members to open their mouths in the meeting (1 Corinthians 12-14).

The conventional sermon hinders this very process.

Third, the sermon preserves the unbiblical clergy mentality. It creates an excessive and pathological dependence on the clergy. The sermon makes the preacher the religious specialist - the only one having anything worthy to say. Everyone else is treated as a second-class believer - a silent pew warmer. (While this is not usually voiced, it is the unspoken reality)"

How can the pastor learn from the other members of the body of Christ when they are muted? How can the church learn from the pastor when its members cannot ask him questions during his oration? How can the brothers and sisters learn from one another if they are prevented from speaking in the meetings?

The sermon makes "church" both distant and impersonal." It deprives the pastor of receiving spiritual sustenance from the church. And it deprives the church of receiving spiritual nourishment from one another. For these reasons, the sermon is one of the biggest road-blocks to a functioning priesthood!

Fourth, rather than equipping the saints, the sermon de-skills them. It matters not how loudly ministers drone on about "equipping the saints for the work of the ministry," the truth is that the contemporary sermon preached every week has little power to equip YAHUAH's people for spiritual service and functioning.

Unfortunately, however, many of YAHUAH's people are just as addicted to hearing sermons as many preachers are addicted to preaching them.

By contrast, New Testament-styled teaching should equip the assembly so that it can function without the presence of a clergyman.

Fifth, today's sermon is often impractical. Countless preachers speak as experts on that which they have never experienced. Whether it be abstract/theoretical, devotional/inspirational, demanding/compelling, or entertaining/amusing, the sermon fails to put the hearers into a direct, practical experience of what has been preached. Thus, the typical sermon is a swimming lesson on dry land! It lacks any practical value. Much is preached, but little ever lands. Most of it is aimed at the frontal lobe. Contemporary pulpiteerism generally fails to get beyond disseminating information and on to equipping believers to experience and use that which they have heard.

In this regard, the sermon mirrors its true father - Greco-Roman rhetoric. Greco-Roman rhetoric was bathed in abstraction. It involved forms designed to entertain and display genius rather than instruct or develop talents in others. The contemporary polished sermon can warm the heart, inspire the will, and stimulate the mind. But it rarely if ever shows the team how to leave the huddle. In all of these ways, the contemporary sermon fails to meet its billing at promoting the kind of spiritual growth it promises. In the end, it actually intensifies the impoverishment of the church. The sermon acts like a momentary stimulant. Its effects are often short-lived.

Let's be honest. There are scores of Christians who have been sermonized for decades, and they are still babes in Christ. Christians are not transformed simply by hearing sermons week after week. They are transformed by regular encounters with the YAHUAH. Those who minister, therefore, are called to preach YAHUAH and not information about Him. They are also called to make their ministry intensely practical. They are called not only to reveal Messiah by the spoken word, but to show their hearers how to experience, know, follow, and serve Him. The contemporary sermon too often lacks these all-important elements.

If a preacher cannot bring his hearers into a living spiritual experience of that which he is ministering, the results of his message will be short-lived. Therefore, the church needs fewer pulpiteers and more spiritual facilitators. It is in dire need of those who can proclaim Messiah and know how to deploy YAHUAH's people to experience Him who has been preached. And on top of that, Christians need instruction on how to share this living Messiah with the rest of the assembly for their mutual edification.

Consequently, the Christian family needs a restoration of the first-century practice of mutual exhortation and mutual ministry. For the New Testament hinges spiritual transformation upon these two things.

Granted, the gift of teaching is present in the assembly. But teaching is to come from all the believers (1 Corinthians 14:26, 31) as well as from those who are specially gifted to teach.

(Ephesians 4: 11; James 3:1). We move far outside of biblical bounds when we allow teaching to take the form of a conventional sermon and relegate it to a class of professional orators.

Wrapping It Up

Is preaching and teaching the Word of YAHUAH scriptural? Yes, absolutely. But the contemporary pulpit sermon is not the equivalent of the preaching and teaching that is found in the Scriptures.

It cannot be found in the Old Testament, the ministry of YAHUSHUA, or the life of the primitive assembly." -

What is more, Shaul told his Greek converts that he refused to be influenced by the communication patterns of his pagan contemporaries (1 Corinthians 1:17,22; 2:1-5.)

But what about 1 Corinthians 9:22-23 (NLT), where Shaul says, "I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some"? We would argue that this would not include making a weekly sermon the focus of all worship gatherings, which would have stifled the believers' transformation and mutual edification.

The sermon was conceived in the womb of Greek rhetoric. It was born into the Christian community when pagans turned Christians began to bring their oratorical styles of speaking into the assembly. By the third century, it became common for Christian leaders to deliver a sermon. By the fourth century it became the norm.

Christianity has absorbed its surrounding culture. When your pastor mounts his pulpit wearing his clerical robes to deliver his sacred sermon, he is unknowingly playing out the role of the ancient Greek orator.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the contemporary sermon does not have a shred of biblical merit to support its existence, it continues to be uncritically admired in the eyes of most present-day Christians. It has become so entrenched in the Christian mind that most Bible-believing pastors and laymen fail to see that they are affirming and perpetuating an unscriptural practice out of sheer tradition. The sermon has become permanently embedded.

In view of all that we have discovered about the contemporary sermon, consider these questions:

How can a man preach a sermon on being faithful to the Word of YAHUAH while he is preaching a sermon? And how can a Christian passively sit in a pew and affirm the priesthood of all believers when he is passively sitting in a pew? To put a finer point on it, how can you claim to up hold the Protestant doctrine of sola scripture ("by the Scripture only") and still support the pulpit sermon?

As one author so eloquently put it, "The sermon is, in practice, beyond criticism. It has become an end in itself, sacred-the product of a distorted reverence for 'the tradition of the elders' . . . it seems strangely inconsistent that those who are most disposed to claim that the Bible is the Word of YAHUAH, the 'supreme guide in all matters of faith and practice' are amongst the first to reject biblical methods in favor of the 'broken cisterns' of their fathers (Jeremiah 2:13)."

Is there really any room in the church's corral for sacred cows like the sermon? Promoting Hebraic Understanding of Hebrew Scriptures; Where Did The Christian Sermon Come From?

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