

# Deinstitutionalizing Our Faith



## Returning to God's Design for His Church

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction –</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter One – Leaving Institutional Faith Behind</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter Two – Effects on the Word of God</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter Three – Effects on Leadership and Mission</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter Four – Effects on the Worship Gathering</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter Five – Money</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter Six – The Congregation</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter Seven – Effects on the Gospel</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Chapter Eight – Spiritual Warfare, Strongholds and Our Struggle With Sin</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter Nine – Refocusing on the Vineyard, Spreading Salt and Shedding Light in Our Communities</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Chapter Ten – Guarding Against the Institutional Effects Takes Intentionality</b>	<b>63</b>

<b>Chapter Eleven – Gathering Organically and By the Instructions</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Appendix – Helpful Resources</b>	<b>74</b>

## Introduction

Consider this thought. I hand you a Bible and ask you to describe what it says about the church after the resurrection of Jesus. What would you describe to me? How closely would it resemble the churches you see around America today? Now I want you to take that Bible and follow the instructions you find in it. Create a church from those instructions. Do you form a corporation? Do you apply for tax exempt status? Do you buy a building, hire professional clergy or open your doors to unbelievers? These practices are common in the institution we call church but they are absent from the Bible.

Any real discussion of the church must address the institution. I know most don't want to talk about it. Many don't even think about it. This book is going to bring out all of its dirty secrets. The New Covenant established by Jesus Christ through His death, burial and resurrection, established a new order for God's children and church. See Acts chapter 2. It established the New Testament church, the Christian church. Jesus did this by pouring out His Holy Spirit on His disciples on the Day of Pentecost.

The work and ministry of Jesus fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17). This did away with the Levitical Priesthood and the Temple Worship System. See Hebrews chapter 7. The institution that God ordained had been replaced by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. See 2 Corinthians chapter 3. For the next couple of centuries we see the church operating in the new design. It was organic in nature. The leaders were recognized by the power they displayed and their ministry in the Spirit. The church was illegal and faced great persecution.

Many of you know that the Roman Government persecuted the early church. You need to know that the declining Jewish religious system also persecuted the early church. A quick read of the Book of Acts will confirm this. Paul addresses this topic in his letter to the Galatians. In chapter 4 he uses an analogy to explain the persecution. The analogy uses a story from Genesis about two real women and their sons. Paul uses these people in an analogy that compares the two women and their two sons to two covenants and two mountains to represent two religious systems. One woman is Sarah and she gives birth to Isaac. Isaac is the son of promise. The other woman is Hagar and her son is Ishmael. The woman Sarah represents the Spirit and Hagar represents the flesh or self-effort.

These two women also represent two mountains, two cities and two covenants. Hagar is equated with Mount Sinai, the earthly Jerusalem and the Old covenant with its temple system and priesthood. Sarah represents the heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy mountain and the new covenant in the Holy spirit. The covenant represented by Hagar is the institutional Jewish religious system and it is in slavery and produces slaves. Sarah represents the one led by the Spirit. It is free and produces free children. In the conclusion of this chapter, he encourages them to cast out the bondwoman Hagar and her son Ishmael, the product of human effort, and to take the freedom that Christ came to give them. I wrote this book to encourage you to do the same. He calls the religious system a yoke of bondage.

Gal 5:1 NASB95 - It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

The flesh persecutes the Spirit. The religious institution

persecutes those who are free from it. What was true in Paul's day is true today.

In 313 A.D., The Edict of Milan made it legal to be Christian in the Roman Empire. Soon after this declaration we see an institution formed over the church. It brought with it a paid professional clergy, a tax-exempt status and it became building centered. None of this is instructed in Scripture. Over time this institution put in rules and systems to control the church. It made creeds to determine who was really a Christian. The early church did not make creeds. It asked if you had received the Holy Spirit. The institution made orders of service and liturgy. The early church operated on spiritual gifts in a free-flowing manner. In a very short time, the church was transformed back into an institution.

The institution over the church became brutal and controlling. It controlled the land which gave it great wealth. It claimed to control access to heaven which gave it great power to those that believed the claim. This institution became one with the government in 799 A.D. and controlled armies. It became a force of war and domination. It was the institution called church that launched the Crusades, the inquisition, the pursuit of the Reformers and the murder of the Anabaptists.

There was a historical glimmer of hope that the church could break free of its captor, Hagar, and return to its organic roots and God given design. The Protestant Reformation set free God's children from the control of the institution. But it wasn't long before the new movements began forming their own institutions. It appears many Christians like being ruled over by men and structures. Soon we discovered that we had traded one institution for thousands.

Well I'm done with the charades! I can't act like the institution is legitimately the true church described in the Bible. I can't stay silent any longer. The institution is not the church. There I said it. I feel better. The church is made up of those whose names are found written in the Lambs Book of Life.

(Revelation 20:15) It is not your denomination, building or corporate church. These things may include people that are the church but these things are not the church. Let's accept the fact that we have all been institutionalized. The institutions that portray themselves as God's church are not His church. I know I can get you to agree. We all know that God's church is the people. It's not a denomination or a building or a corporation. So why do we all act like it is? No longer will I participate in the age-old charade of disguising the church as something other than what God designed it to be. I have taken Paul's advice to the Galatians and I have kicked out the Bondwoman and her son. (Galatians 4:30)

The purpose of this book is not to bash or denigrate the real church in any way. It is to open eyes to a false church of institution that dominates the landscape. It is an effort to help people make the journey back to God's design for His church. The institutional age of the church has greatly distorted God's instructions. It has put the word of God into a filter and interpreted it in accordance with its own design. As I wrote at the beginning of this introduction, if you only had Scripture to work from, I don't see how you would arrive at our modern institutional form of church.

I will not be gentle or pull punches. I know the reaction that many will have to this book. The more you love the institution, the more vile your reaction will be. That's OK, I can take it. I

have been on this road for many years and some of the harshest attacks I have experienced have been from institutional church people. The same thing happened to Jesus and the apostles. It was the dying institution's leaders that had Jesus killed. This book is for the remnant that needs to hear what they always suspected. It's for the remnant that God is calling to bigger and better things.

We need to face some cold hard facts. The institutional church in America is dying at a rapid rate. We are in a period of historical declines in church attendance. We just saw the institutional church devastated by the Covid-19 pandemic. I used to ask people what they would do if all the churches closed tomorrow? I asked them what would their Christian faith look like. What would they do? I no longer have to ask because many found out. Because of this awakening, we may see thousands more churches close permanently due to this pandemic. I believe that God is at work setting His children free from the institution.

By the end of this book, I hope you have a new desire to obey God in matters regarding the church. I hope you see the damage that has been done by institutional practices and structures. I hope you decide to embark on a journey of rediscovering God's design for His church.



## **Chapter One**

### **Leaving Institutional Faith Behind**

I was raised apart from any church involvement. I was led to the Lord by my cousin on the back porch of my grandmother's house after a drug overdose at age 13. When my cousin took me to church, it was obvious that he thought it was great. For me it was just weird. It seemed to me that there were some who played a role in performing in the “service”. There were others that were just there to watch. It looked like everyone knew what to do but me. They knew when and what to sing. They knew when to stand and when to sit back down. They even knew why they passed the plate around. I didn't know any of this and it made me very uncomfortable. I was not struck by God or even made more aware of who He was.

Maybe that was my problem from the start. I had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for my sins by faith, but I didn't understand how the church service connected to that story. I felt a need to understand these things. I asked questions. Later in life I “joined” into the institutional church culture. I had read the Bible more, but I still didn't see in the Bible so many of the things that occurred on Sunday. I still kept asking questions. This led me to being labeled as rebellious by church pastors. I wasn't rebellious. I was curious. They solicited questions about doctrine, but shunned and labeled me for asking about the practices of the church. It became very clear that certain questions were not welcome.

It's not like I didn't try to fit in or follow the rules, I did. I eventually quit asking those questions. I guess I realized that they either didn't know the answers or didn't want to share the

answer. I eventually went to Bible college and obtained my degree. I was sure I would get my answers there. After receiving my Ph.D. in theology, I still didn't have my answers. I was ordained in a mainstream denomination. I even tried starting a church. It just never felt right. I finally came to a place where I fell on my face before God and asked Him what's wrong with me. Why did I feel so out of place in His church?

Many of you have felt these feelings. Many have faced the backlash of asking “rebellious” questions. We try to fit in. We presume that if everyone does it this way it must be right – right? Wrong! There is a culture at work in Christianity that is not new. It came into existence a couple hundred years after Christ and it dominates the landscape in many countries. It is the culture of the institutional church. I was raised outside the church but I still had the effects of the institution on me. We have that in common you and me. We have all been institutionalized.

This book doesn't attempt to argue about whether we can have a corporate structure over our churches or any freedom we may have to change the way God instructs His church to be formed and function. This work asks the question “Why follow man's way when we have instructions from God on how to do it better?”. This work simply states the modern institutional corruption, compares it to the Biblical instruction and explains the negative effect of the institutional practice on God's people. These negative effects are numerous. It is my opinion that nothing has done more harm to the bride of Christ than the institution. So please spare me the “church hater” speech. I love the bride of Jesus. However, the bride of Jesus is not an organization, denomination or a building. It is a supernaturally indwelt group of believers living life together. We will never

return to that bride until we intentionally deinstitutionalize our faith.

So how do we deinstitutionalize our faith? How fortunate for us that we have examples to follow from Scripture. There were many in Jesus' day that were raised in an institutional faith. They had dedicated their lives to it. All of their wealth and social network depended upon their participation in and obedience to the system. Then they met Jesus. That one encounter changed everything. It led Paul to refer to these former things as rubbish (Phil. 3:8). It led Peter and John to tell the council that they must follow God and not man (Acts 4:19). The disciples left the institutional faith of the temple system and followed Jesus outside the camp. Aren't you glad they had the courage to do that? Who, in coming generations, will be grateful for your courage to do the same now?

How do we come to terms with the biblical context of the church when so much of what is done on a Sunday morning has no basis in the Bible? I will first encourage you to ask questions. Questions are good. If you are being asked to join and support a religious system, you should, at the very least, know where it gets its authority to do the things it does. I highly recommend the book *Pagan Christianity* by George Barna and Frank Viola. These men have done a great job documenting where our modern church practices originated.

Another essential step in deinstitutionalizing your faith is to accept that the modern church institution has no basis in scripture. The New Testament did not establish a corporate structure, tax exempt status, professional clergy, a doctrine statement, a worship leader, the command to tithe, the Sunday sermon, the senior pastor or many other common practices of

the institutional church. These practices were adopted by men and are now so prevalent that we don't even question them. In order to deinstitutionalize your faith, you must make it your goal to ask why we do that. Once you answer the question, you should look to the Bible and ask God how He intended it to be done. Once you have your answers, the only choice is to obey God. God will lead you to His design for His church if your desire is to obey Him.

That is the ultimate goal of this book. I want to see people open their eyes to the corruption of the institutional form of church and return to obey God in His design. I want to ask the hard questions. I want to explore scripture for how God said to do things. I want to compare man's methods with those designed by God. I want us to see how much better the bride can function when it is not held in the current institutional forms. I want to see the bride set free from Hagar and the slavery she produces.

We have seen the structures of man shape the outward expression of the church for over 1700 years. Breaking free from those structures will not be easy. We all need to go through a process of deinstitutionalization. This process works best when you engage it with others that are on that journey. Not everyone can do that. I will warn you now. If you take this journey, your life will change. It will become hard to sit in an institutional church. You will begin to hunger for more. You will experience God in ways you never thought possible. The Bible will come alive like never before. All of this is a good thing.

So let's get you ready for the journey. You must understand that the institution has instilled practices into your faith. Many of

these things you have grown to love. Some have become sacred cows. I want you to have faith. Have faith that God's design is better than the design of men. Trust that if you obey God you will miss nothing. Remember Paul's thoughts to the Philippians. You too may count it all as rubbish once you discover God's design for His church.

One more warning before you proceed. This book is not for everyone. It is for the remnant that God is calling out. Don't take this book to your pastor hoping to fix your church. If your church is an institutional church, it can only be fixed one way. It must cease to exist. The problem is the institutional form, not the people. Even if your pastor agrees with this writing and is moved to act upon it, there is only one way to resolve it. It is the same for everyone. Leave the institution! You must kick the bondwoman Hagar and her son out of your life.

## Chapter Two

### Effects on the Word of God

All of our English translations of the Bible have come out of the institutional age of the church. This doesn't mean that those translations are bad. It does mean that those who made the translations saw the interpretation of scripture through the lens of an institution. The lens of your worldview will always color what you see. The lens of the institution colors the English translations of the Bible that you read each day.

This manifests through the word choices made during translation. Many Greek words have more than one possible English translation. Often the metaphorical meanings are passed over for more literal words. But we see the use of analogy and metaphor throughout scripture.

Words take their meaning based on the context in which they are used. For example, the word pot can have many meanings. It can be a utensil for cooking, a slang for marijuana or even a metaphor for when things go bad. The decision for which interpretation we use must be based on the context in which the word appears. If we read the Bible with the understanding that it speaks of an institutional form of church, we will likely miss some context. On the other hand, if we see Scripture as describing an organic and free flowing movement of spirit filled people, it can have a different context. An example of this is the King James use of the word office in translating the Greek word *diakonia*. This word is most often translated as ministry. There is no need to use the word office except that the institution makes offices of ministry.

Another great example of how our cultural context shapes translation is found in the Book of Acts in the King James Version.

Act 28:13 KJV] - And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:

I don't think there are many today that understand what the term “fetched a compass” means. In the culture of the time, it was common language. Simply put, culture effects word choice and word choice effects translation.

We distort the instruction of Scripture when we place authority in denominational or institutional offices. The interpretation of passages of scripture that refer to leadership must either be translated to fit into our organizations structure or overlooked as not applicable today. Leadership in a free-flowing Holy Spirit led way negates the authority of institutional forms. The New Testament describes appropriated authority that is accepted or rejected as a result of its power in ministry, the rebellious nature of the people or recommendations from other leaders. This is far from the delegated authority of the modern institution where we are told who is in charge due to title, office or education.

The point of starting this chapter in such a way is to point out that it is not our English translations that are the infallible Word of God. The doctrine of inerrancy of the Scripture applies only to the original writings. The modern translations of your Bible do not carry that same infallibility. This is made obvious by a stark conflict found in many English translations of the Bible. This glaring error is found in 1 Corinthians 14 and has led to

many divisions in the church over the gift of tongues. I wrote about this in detail in my first book *Disciple Driven Church – The Coming Reformation*. You can find a thorough discussion of the topic in that work.

According to the Bible it is the Holy Spirit that brings us all truth. It does not need to come through a man-made leadership structure. See 1 Corinthians 2:9-13, John 14:26; 16:13. God is able to show those who are approved by Him. God will lead His church and safeguard truth through the working of power and spiritual gifts, if we let Him.

We have seen a gradual move towards intellectualism in Christianity. In the beginning of the church, we see leadership affirmed by the working of power and the fruit of the ministry of the disciples. Now we see leadership chosen and hired based on degrees earned, speaking ability and institutional management skills. This is far from what the Bible describes.

One reason for these changes is the desire for control. Institutions are built for control. They control who can join and how, who can preach and teach, who can lead, what to believe and so much more. This has led us to requiring degrees for leadership instead of fruitfulness and consecration. The degrees must be obtained from approved institutions that agree with certain doctrine and practices. All of this is done to control what is taught in the quest to control heresy.

Early in the institutional age we saw the rise of creeds. These creeds were developed in order to combat what was seen as heresy. If you didn't agree with the creed, you weren't Christian. The early church never imposed creeds. They knew conflicts were within the churches. Look at Acts 15 to see how



conflicts were handled without an institution. The resolution of this conflict was not a list of doctrines that must be followed but rather a list of practices to be avoided. These were to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. I find it interesting that I have never seen these things included in a doctrinal statement. Keep in mind that the issue was with itinerant teachers. There is no mention of excluding the teachers from the assembly. There was clarification of that which was being taught and the correction came in the form of what practices to avoid. No doctrinal statement to agree with for membership. No permanent resolution to the conflict. We see another problem arise with the Galatians that involved itinerant teachers. They were telling the Galatians they had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul did not respond with a doctrinal statement but rather a rebuke.

Today we have seen the rise of the statement of faith or doctrinal statement. It is so prevalent that many people ask to see it before they will attend a church service. The institution has elevated doctrine to such a point that many Christians can't imagine fellowship with anyone outside their institution's approved doctrine. What a shame. We have allowed Satan to make a tool of division a prominent part of our Christian faith. This is a far cry from the question we see most often asked by the disciples in the New Testament. They wanted to know if you had received the Holy Spirit. Oh, that we could get back to that place.

Somewhere along the way, we accepted the idea that leadership, therefore the institution, has as a primary role, the obligation to defend against heresy. This role is not given to the institution because no institution is ordered by God after the

resurrection of Jesus. The idea of being guardians against heresy is another tool of control. This tool is destroying the church today. Jesus said that our unity will be a sign to the world and that because of it they may believe (John 17:21). Instead of unity, the institution has bred division through doctrine.

There are thousands of denominations and each one has their own particular statement of doctrine, liturgy and practices. Most will not interact in meaningful ways with other denominations. This becomes most evident in the sacrament of communion. We may accept others as Christian but many denominations control or forbid participation in communion with those outside the denomination. How did the symbol of our unity in Christ become such a divisive thing? This division is a glaring problem for many unbelievers. Many see this as an indication that Christians don't know the truth. Even worse they see it as proof that there are many ways to heaven. This is the opposite result of the purpose of doctrinal statements. This is partially due to the way we handle biblical interpretation.

The way the Bible was handled changed after the enlightenment era and the age of science and reason. Hermeneutics became the preferred approach to what was beginning to be seen as a text book. However, the Bible is not a text book. It refers to itself as living and active. It is not the third person of the trinity either. It claims the necessity of the Holy Spirit in order to understand it. The Holy Spirit is God and it is through our relationship with the Holy Spirit that we gain understanding of Scripture. These two facts alone negate hermeneutics as the primary means by which we should interpret Scripture. Hermeneutics can be helpful. We must remember that the Bible is a supernatural revelation of God to

man that only becomes fully understood with the help of the Holy Spirit.

These trends of intellectualism and hermeneutics have led some to refer to the Bible in “owners manual” type language. Some have called it the basic instructions before leaving earth or life's handbook. These terms undervalue the Bible and fail to acknowledge its supernatural and revelatory nature. All of these things help the Bible fit well into an institution. A supernatural revelatory book that has a fluid interpretation is hard to control. Rigid points of doctrine stated as succinctly as possibly make for good litmus tests for those wishing to join the organization. As in the early church, our primary question should remain – “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?”. Everything else can be worked out over time.

One disturbing problem that has resulted from all of these effects of the institution is the practice of proof-texting. Some don't feel the need to be so concerned about context now that the Bible is separated by chapter and verse. So a modern practice is to take a verse plucked out of context in order to support a belief that is already held by the person or denomination. This has led to many divisions in Christianity. It has also caused many to firmly hold beliefs built on shaky foundations.

One example of proof texting is found in the use of Matthew 7:1 as a command not to judge. When this passage is balanced in light of other Scripture, we can see that it is not saying to never judge. How else can we balance it with 1 Corinthians 5:12 where we are told it is our responsibility to judge? The danger of this practice is that it promotes error. We must take Scripture in context but many are just set on supporting their

doctrinal statements.

How do we deinstitutionalize our faith in regards to the Bible? The very first step is to read it. Read it from beginning to end. Read it every day. Read it in context. Become a student of the historical, cultural and geographic significance. Prayerfully consider the texts. Avoid trying to boil it down to a doctrinal statement. Ask yourself what the passage says about God. Most importantly, make sure you have received the Holy Spirit.

Get your Gospel in order. The Good News is just that – Good News. The institution has created a Gospel that doesn't tell the whole story. Our doctrine should flow naturally out of our Gospel. The Gospel is the seed that sprouts into the kingdom of God. The Bible is the Gospel from beginning to end. The Good News starts in Genesis and flows through Revelation.

Ask God to show you the things that need to be revealed. In Jeremiah 31:15 we see a reference to Rachel dying in childbirth. No hermeneutical approach would have arrived at the true meaning of this passage. In Matthew 2:17-18 we see that this passage was a prophesy of Herod putting to death all the children in an attempt to kill Jesus.

Remember to obey what you read. The Bible is not designed to be an intellectual pursuit. It is designed to transform the reader into the likeness of Christ. This is accomplished as we come into agreement with the Word of God and obey it. We can memorize the Scripture and it will have no benefit to us unless we embrace and obey it.

## Chapter Three

### Effects on Leadership and Mission

The impact of the institution on leadership structures and mission cannot be overstated. When we look at the leadership structure of the early church, we see a high reliance on the leadership of the Apostles and those who traveled with them. When we explore Scripture for instruction on leadership, we see it relies heavily on spiritual gifts. Both of these display a connected leadership structure where the local church was served by elders and deacons and all the churches were connected by traveling apostolic leaders that worked to connect the local churches in care and mission.

The traveling leaders gave instruction and correction as well as appointing or confirming elders and deacons. At times, they were recognized and followed. At other times, their letters were excluded from the very congregations they had once started. See 3 John. This demonstrates that there was no enforced hierarchy in place over the early church. Leadership authority was appropriated through power and ministry in the Gospel. This is very different from most structures we see at work in the church today.

What we do know is that they held no official office in an organization. This would not develop for hundreds of years. Their authority came from their ministry in the Gospel and the power they demonstrated. God's hand of approval was upon them. They did not impose a hierarchy on the church. They enforced no doctrinal statement. There was no forced order of service or liturgy. When disputes arose, the people sought out the respected leaders that were recognized by all.

We often see the early leadership bringing correction through their writing in regards to behavior not doctrine. They address immorality and selfishness to the Corinthian church. They oppose enforcing adherence to the practices of Law to the Galatians. It is clear that the early leaders knew the need for a transformed life was greater than the need for a correct doctrinal statement. I am not saying their writing was devoid of doctrine. Teaching correctly is important. Enforcing belief in order to be included in a gathering appears to have only included the teachings about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Even Paul proclaims this in 1 Corinthians 2:2. The main question that preceded inclusion in the church was to ask if they had received the Holy Spirit.

The early church leadership appeared to value obedience to God, sacrificial living for the benefit of others and living free from sin and the stain of the world. The institutional church changed greatly with the addition of a professional clergy class. We now had a stationary leadership that ruled over a local congregation. Their power to lead was invested in the office and the title of the office holder instead of their spiritual power. The measures of ministry success were being redefined.

As generations passed, we see positions at desirable churches being appointed as reward to family members or in exchange for money. The leadership structure began to put in place minimum education requirements for these posts. Seminaries were developed to train people for the new profession of clergy. The new clergy class needed to learn how to manage the institution. The institution was not found in Scripture, so there was now a need for training on how to run this new way of church. The church had made the shift from leadership as a

function of a spiritual gifts to that of a position that required educational attainment. Leadership had become a managerial task. This eventually led to the institution adopting secular leadership values and tactics. This is so common now that you can hardly tell which one is which.

The difference in these two methods of raising up leaders is profound. When we rely on the function of a spiritual gift in order to lead, then God is required in the process. When we require educational attainment then God is not required. The early church led by preaching the Gospel, making disciples and demonstrating spiritual power. Today's clergy are rarely required to do any of these in order to qualify for the office. Clergy are expected to preach but not necessarily the Gospel that Jesus preached. I have met many Pastors that have never learned to make disciples and even more that do not display the power of the Holy Spirit. I have met many that deny the power of the Holy Spirit is at work today in ways similar to those we see in the Bible.

Today the idea of a professional clergy is well set in our church culture. We not only have pastors but we have a pastor for every possible thing. As the institution creates programming it also creates the need for management of that programming. The standard response today is to hire a “pastor” to fill that need. A quick search of church jobs will find worship, executive, teaching, small group, missions, children's, youth and many more “pastors” needed. The more entrenched in professional clergy we become, the farther from God's design we get.

We must remember that pastor is a spiritual gift not an office. According to the Bible, only God can make a pastor. We should

also note that God did not design the pastor gift to run an institution. This is the result of having an institutional context interpreting Scripture. The same is done with other listed spiritual gifts. The institution loves to make titles and offices where gifts were intended.

Today we see a well-established institutional church form that is run and managed by a professional clergy class. None if this is instructed from Scripture. With these forms has come new ways to measure ministry success. It is well known in the clergy class that the 3 B's determine success of the church. These are buildings, budgets and butts in the seats. It is taught as doctrine in many circles today. Clergy are measured by these things. The bigger these things are in a church, the more highly regarded the leadership is. This idea has helped fuel the age of the megachurch.

This change in measurement has changed the goal of discipleship. The institution looks to make good church members. Good church members attend services and give tithes. They help the church maintain the building and the clergy salaries. This is important to an institutional form of church. It is not important to the church we see in Scripture. The church in Scripture was organic and met house to house. It supported leaders at times but there is no evidence of positions and salaries.

When I examine the New Testament, I do not find any place where attending a meeting is equated with spiritual maturity. Yet in today's institution we most often find this to be the case. Showing up at church each week is equated with dedication to God. In some cases, you cannot become a member of the church unless you agree to support it financially. None of this



is instructed or demonstrated in Scripture. The New Testament describes maturity in terms of one's ability to handle the Word of God and engage in the mission of building the kingdom.

This change has greatly impacted the average Christian that attends the institution. God designed the church to be a gathering of Holy Spirit filled disciples using their supernatural spiritual gifts to build each other up. Today we see a very few that are allowed to do this. They are leading a majority who are expected to be passive recipients that support the structure. By measuring the wrong things, we have ended up with the wrong results.

The impact of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation let loose people long held under the institution of the Catholic Church. As they scrambled to discover their new found freedom from the institution, many divisions arose. These people were raised in the institution. It was all they knew. They had been institutionalized very much like many of us have been today. They had been taught the ways of the institution. It is much harder to flee the effects of the institution than it is to flee the institution itself.

They fled the professional priestly class of the Catholic Church to create a new professional class called Pastor. They quickly ended up building buildings, creating doctrinal statements and defining liturgy. Differences of opinion developed among these reformers. They began to form alliances as they discovered other like-minded believers. Thus, was born the denomination. The reformers had traded one institution for thousands of them. This is the most succinct way I can define denominations. They are tools of division. The goal is to separate from other Christians that do not hold to our beliefs and practices. This is

harshly condemned by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:11-15.

What are we to do to break free from our institutional church mindset? The steps are simple but may not be easy. The first step is to stop supporting this form of church. Depart from your institutional church. Leave your denomination behind. Stop giving your money to pay salary to a professional clergy class. Heed Paul's instruction to the Galatians – Kick out the bondwoman and her son from your midst. If everyone would do these things, we would see reformation take place and the church could begin to learn to embrace God's design and forsake the institutional form that holds it captive today.

I know this is hard to imagine for many. There really is no other first step. I meet many who think they will change the church from within. This is impossible to do. The reason is simple. In order to change the institution back to God's design, the institution would need to cease to exist. There is no small fix here. We are so far from the instruction of Scripture that the only remedy is total abandonment of the institutional system.

These are just the first steps. Next you need to deinstitutionalize your faith. This will require you to wipe clean the slate of your church experience. The early reformers quickly adopted similar practices to those they abandoned when they fled the Catholic Church. The same can happen with you. There is no benefit to leaving one corrupt institution in order to form another. Go back to the Bible and look at the New Testament instruction for the church. Only do what you see written there. God will take care of the rest.

Drop your reliance on doctrinal statements. The core of our

doctrine must come from the Gospel we preach. If we are preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus and the Apostles preached, then it will include all the basics of the Christian faith. Those things that fall outside of your Gospel are likely debatable and should not be reasons for division.

Return to the Mission of Jesus. The mission was corrupted by the institution. We turned the organic expansion of the Kingdom of God into a quest to build institutional churches. Start by loving your neighbor. Care for the poor, the widows and the orphans. Learn to share the Gospel of the Kingdom. Prepare to share your testimony. Go out into the world and love people. Just love them because God first loved you. Don't go with the ulterior motive of getting them to join you at a location on a set day of the week.

Learn your spiritual gifts. The church was designed by God to form and function on the basis of spiritual gifts. Knowing your spiritual gifts is essential to deinstitutionalizing your faith. The use of your spiritual gifts are the foundation of gathering together as a church body. As you do these things you will find others along the way. Preach the Gospel and make disciples. Gather with your disciples to build up the body and engage in the mission. This is the church!

I have been traveling this road of deinstitutionalizing my faith for many years. I have dedicated my life to helping others do the same. I truly believe that this is what God is doing today in America. There is a revival coming and it will happen outside the institution, if we are faithful to meet Him there. See Hebrews 13. This revival will birth a reformation of the church that will impact generations. In order to participate we must return to God's design for our faith and His church.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Effects on Worship and Gathering**

The rise of the institutional age greatly impacted the way the church gathered and worshiped together. The first major change that occurred was in having a publicly accessible place to worship. The gathering of the saints moved from covert locations and private homes to the public square. This made Christianity a visible religion. Up to this point, the early church was illegal and many of its outward expressions were a result of that illegal status. There was a mystery to the church. The way into the fellowship was the Gospel. With the addition of public worship spaces, the way into the church changed. It was now the front door. Anyone could attend the worship gathering. This may at first appear to be a positive change. In reality, it greatly weakened the commitment required to join the church. This in turn weakened the church as a whole.

Prior to this change, a person was presented with Jesus and the Gospel. They made a decision to follow Christ based on the Gospel. If they decided to follow Christ and get baptized, they could be included in the worship gathering. With the new public spaces, people were now presented with a church building and a worship service. They could decide to participate apart from the Gospel. The institution became the visible presentation of Jesus to the world. This is not what God intended. The spirit filled children of God are intended to be the carriers of the seed of the Gospel. This change has led us down a slippery slope to today's modern consumerist presentation of church.

Consider this. Before the institution, the church would mobilize

the people to share the Gospel and minister in the community. After the institution, people were told to go invite people to church. The goal was to have them hear the Gospel from the professional clergy. For many churches this led to having the pastor preach a sermon on the Gospel every Sunday. You need more than a weekly presentation of the Gospel to equip you for the works of ministry.

As the effectiveness of this method declined, the institution adapted. It started designing the buildings, music, services and sermon topics to appeal to the perceived needs of the community. In effect, the institution was changing the gathering to appeal to unbelievers or uncommitted people. This leaves many Christians wanting more. So due to this, we see the rise of theatrics in the Sunday service. We see large, extravagant children's ministry centers. Many times these are designed with the things of the world. In order to keep people coming to the Sunday service we have offered up the smorgasbord of events, programs and services.

This change in who could gather was significant. Prior to the Edict of Milan there is no indication that unbelievers were allowed to gather with believers for worship. The New Testament warns us against this practice in 2 Corinthians 6:14. Once Christianity became legal and established paid clergy, it opened the worship gathering to everyone. This practice is so common today that most Christians can't imagine a gathering that is open to only believers. This is what is instructed in Scripture. It was the practice of the early church. Allowing unbelievers to enter the worship gathering violates God's instructions and is a product of the institutional age.

If we follow the instruction of Scripture for our gatherings, we

will see that unbelievers will not be able to function there. The biblical gathering is a place for the Holy Spirit to manifest in God's children through spiritual gifts for the purpose of worship, edification and building up each other. Unbelievers do not possess the Holy Spirit so they would not be able to participate.

The institution changed the requirement to participate. The Gospel was no longer the required first step. Now attendance at a service was an acceptable first step. The institution became an intermediate step to the Gospel. People were welcomed to the church services regardless of their opinion about God. This change has caused confusion for many people trying to determine what is required to be a part of God's church. Is it attendance? Do I have to walk an aisle and respond to an invitation? Is it baptism or something else? At what level of commitment am I really “in”?

Our love affair with location began with the rise of dedicated buildings to house the church. In the early church the idea of building was confined to the church that met at this person's house. Today we often get that first question about our churches – “Where is your church located?”. The institution took the church away from its organic and free flowing roots and placed it in a building in the center of the town square. Now we have church buildings covering the landscape. The institution continues to put God in a building sized box.

Another negative effect of the building centered institution is that it puts the focus on ministry activities into one location. No one is more aware of this than institutional church leadership. They are regularly trying to get the church out of the building. Maybe they don't realize that they are responsible for putting

them in the building in the first place. Christians have been commanded to go. The institution commands us to come to the building. The institution has presented itself as the house of God or the place to find Him. Nothing can be further from the truth. God does not dwell in temples made with human hands. (Acts 17:24)

The growth of the institution ushered in an increase in the number of church buildings and an increase in professional clergy. This new style of worship gathering took on many new characteristics. The style of these services has more roots in pagan culture than in the instruction of Scripture. Some of these stylistic elements are the raised platform and podium. The churches also designed the auditorium or sanctuary to be filled with rows of seating facing forward. This change was designed to give the audience a better view of the stage where the religious activities would take place.

Prior to this change you could expect to find an active group of Christians at worship gatherings. They could all participate by using their spiritual gifts. Anyone could bring a teaching, a prophesy or a psalm. There was no Sunday sermon as we know it today. The building centered institution made the church congregation passive participants in what was designed by God to be a place of active service. As the institution began to dominate the culture, these changes became so common they are expected. Could you imagine your church service without a sermon? I hope you will soon experience that.

The change from active to passive attendees has devastated the power of the modern church. Many Christians attend church regularly hoping to get something more out of it. The problem is that we are expecting all God has for us in a system He never

designed. We are not designed by God to be passive participants in another person's ministry. We have been given the Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts so we can actively join God in ministering to each other and redeeming the world. This goes for Sunday and every other day of the week as well.

There is one more distortion I want to address that is caused by the institution. When the church became an institution, it changed from the organic and spontaneous experience of the children of God filled by His Spirit. It changed from presenting the Gospel of Jesus to presenting a building and the things offered in that building. This greatly altered the way we presented the church to the world. This change in presentation has distorted our relationship with the world as well. Instead of presenting the transformational power of Jesus, we see many presenting their church institution. I have more people tell me about their church and its pastor than I have that tell me about Jesus.

The institution divided as time went on. Now we are presenting to the world thousands of denominations and independent belief systems that all claim to have the right Jesus. This has brought great harm to the cause of Christ. These divisions in the church now compete for followers. They develop more and more outrageous ways to get people to walk through that front door. All of this is done with the hope that some will accept Jesus as their savior. The institutions of church offer a multitude of programs and events designed to get people to church. All of these things lack the simple power of the Gospel as it is presented by a spirit filled Christian.

The practices are so entrenched that they are taught to church planters. There is teaching on how to get people in the front



door and close the back door so they don't quickly leave. When I first heard this teaching, I felt like we were constructing some kind of trap. If we successfully followed these teachings then we would get people hooked on the Sunday service and church offerings while we waited for them to accept Jesus. Sounds silly, doesn't it? It is true and a real thing that is happening in the institution in America right now.

In order to deinstitutionalize your faith, you will need to remove the institution from your experience. Close the doors of your gathering to the unbeliever. Make the Gospel the entry to your church. God has instructed us to serve and bless the world. When we do this in the power of the Holy Spirit, we will find that His way is best. The Gospel is most powerful when delivered in loving service not with light shows and theatrics. Rediscover the power of a simple spirit-led Gospel presentation.

We must all begin to take an active role in the worship gathering. God has gifted each believer with spiritual power to minister. We do not need a professional clergy to lead and guide us. We have the Holy Spirit for that. We do not need to be preached at or sang to for our worship. We need to feel the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through us as we minister to others. We can all participate in our gatherings and expect God will show up.

We can rediscover God's design for the church when we leave the institution, professional clergy and the passive worship environment. This is a very important step in the deinstitutionalization process. It is an essential first step. We must once again portray to the world the church that God designed. That church has one way in and that is through

accepting the Gospel of the Kingdom. We cannot lead with the Gospel of the Kingdom until we quit leading with the institution. The gathering must become the result of spirit filled believers and not the means to make them.

## Chapter Five

### Money

Let's talk about money. You know, Mammon, the other master we can choose to serve. (Matthew 6:24) Money is an important part of life. It is very hard to live without it these days. We are talking about deinstitutionalizing our faith so let's focus on the post resurrection teachings about money. When we do this, we will clearly see how the institution has adopted the teachings of the Old Testament in its approach to money. After we look at these distortions of the New Covenant teachings on money, we will see what is taught about money in the New Testament.

First things first. Let's talk tithe. The word tithe is only used two times in most of the English translations of the Bible. These places are in two Gospel accounts of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees and, in some versions, it is used in Hebrews when recounting Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek. It is never used as a New Covenant teaching. If you teach the tithe, you cannot do it from the post resurrection writings of Scripture. This should be enough to make everyone question the validity of tithing as a part of their Christian faith. But there are other more disturbing questions you must answer if you choose to tithe or teach others to tithe.

From its inception, tithing has been considered as giving to God. If you tithe as a means to give back to God or honor Him, then you must give in the way that He defines. Abraham gave a tenth part, or tithe, from the spoils of his battle. He gave it to Melchizedek who is called a priest of the Lord, the priest of Salem. This one-time act predated the giving of the Law. It was a one-time act and did not satisfy the later requirements found

in the Law. It was from the spoils of war, a windfall if you will. There is no account or evidence that Abraham gave a tithe from his increase on a regular basis. To use Abraham as an example of tithing would be out of context unless we only give a tenth of the spoils of our war victories. Remember that Abraham also practiced animal sacrifice and circumcision prior to the Law. Remember to include that in your church practices as well. (Sarcasm intended)

Next, we should consider the tithe itself. The requirements for the tithe are laid out in the Law. The reasons for the tithe are also mentioned. You should go and do a thorough examination of tithing before you practice it or teach others they must abide by it. Here it is in a nut shell, so to speak. God established a temple system of sacrifice and ordained a priesthood to run the temple system. These priests were not included in the inheritance of the land. They would rely on the tithes and offerings of the other tribes in order to survive. This left them free to minister in the temple.

Many Christians today have equated the modern institution called church with the temple system of the Old Testament. They then equate the professional paid clergy with the supported priesthood. There are several problems with this logic. The first problem is that there is no instruction for a New Testament Temple system or professional paid clergy. The Temple system was destroyed in 70 A.D. and it has not been replaced. In John Chapter 4, Jesus told the woman at the well that true worshipers would worship in spirit and truth. This was in response to her asking which mountain was the correct place to worship God. There is no correct “place” today. There is a correct way – in spirit and truth. The modern institution of church has declared itself to be the temple or house of God.

They have ordained professional paid clergy to be supported by the tithes and offerings. Only by this declaration are they the rightful recipients of tithes and offerings. God did not instruct or ordain it to be this way. This is not something that is supported by Scripture. It is just made up by men that institutionalized the church. If you pay tithes to honor God, then be mindful that tithing to the institution to support a paid professional clergy is not God's design, it is man's. You may need to re-examine where your money goes.

Another problem is with equating the pastor with the Old Testament priest. In the New Testament all Christians are considered priests. Peter speaks of a royal priesthood and a holy nation in regards to all believers. Martin Luther wrote extensively on the priesthood of all believers. It was a foundational teaching in the Reformation and opposed the concept of the priesthood in the Catholic Church. If indeed all believers are priests under one High Priest, Jesus Christ, then to whom do we give our tithes? The answer should be simple. There is no institution to pay tithes to. We should use our money the way God instructs us to use it. Since there is no New Testament instruction on tithing, establishing an institution or the professional clergy, how do we come to the conclusion to pay tithes to an institution to support such a system? The simple answer is that we were taught to do it by the institution and the professional paid clergy.

The modern concept of these things were all born hundreds of years after the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. They did not come from the New Testament. They were adapted from the Old Testament and squeezed into the new man-made institutional system. The truth is that there is no instruction for the current system and clergy found in the New Testament.

Therefore, there can be no Biblical basis for paying a tithe to such an institution or clergy. The requirements taught in today's tithe most closely resemble those found in the law and not the example of Abraham. If you adhere to the tithe and teach it to others you are at risk of two things. One risk is placing yourself back under the Law. Paul wrote extensively on this topic. He never encouraged it. He always told the offenders to avoid putting themselves back under the Law. In Galatians 5:1, he even tells them that Christ set them free so they could be free. I say we should not again take up a yoke of bondage due to money.

The second thing we risk is using what was intended to honor God but mistakenly using it in a way that does not honor Him. I believe most Christians have a very good attitude about the money they give. I think they give it where they think they should and so it can help the work of God. I am not disputing the intention of the giver. I am wanting the giver to get in line with what God instructs us to do with our money. It would be a terrible shame to find out on judgment day that all of our giving went to the wrong place. I know on that day the Word of God will stand as our judge, so why not get aligned with it today?

Now let's look at what the New Testament instructs us to do with our money. The first thing we must accept is that the New Testament teaching on money is not a formula. There is no exact amount to give. There is no set place to deliver your money. The instruction is given mainly by principle. There is a freedom to it. We are to give generously, sacrificially and intentionally. When you take into account all the examples and instructions of giving in the New Covenant, you come away with a clear picture. We are to use our wealth to build the

Kingdom of God. We are not to store up for ourselves. We are not to withhold from the needy.

In Luke 14:33, we see Jesus set a high bar regarding money. He says no one can be His disciple unless they first give up all their own possessions. Our first step to stewardship is to give up our rights to retain. This idea of stewardship is a distorted teaching in the institution. It is often taught that we steward our own possessions so we can give to the work of God. This work is most often defined as supporting the church. This is not the Biblical idea of stewardship. A steward, in Biblical terms, is someone who has charge over another person's possessions. The first step of stewardship is to surrender all we are and all we have to the Lord who purchased us.

The next example we will examine is the early Christians response to receiving the Holy Spirit. In the beginning of the book of Acts, we see them selling their property and possessions. The Scripture says they were sharing it with any as they might have need. It says they had all things in common. I want you to grasp the significance of this picture found in Acts 2:44-47. They believed, were baptized and received the Holy Spirit. They sold their stuff. They distributed the proceeds to the needy among them. They had all things in common. What a picture of love and care in the early church. Notice what was missing. There was no middle man of institution. There was no collection plate or offering time. The response to receiving the Gospel was to take the instruction of Jesus in Luke 14 quite literally.

In Acts chapter 4 we see another example of how the early church handled money. It again states that they were of one heart and mind. It also says they did not consider anything to

be their own. All things were common property. They sold their possessions and property and brought the proceeds to the recognized leaders, the apostles. The apostles didn't keep the money for their salaries or build buildings to gather the disciples into. It says they distributed it to any as they might have need. It also proclaims that abundant grace was upon them all.

Our first money lesson from the New Testament is to give up your possessions and share them with the other believers until there is no need among you. The role of the leaders in the handling of money was to be a conduit of distribution for the congregation. The money was shared by all until no one had any need. What a great way to build love, trust and unity among the body.

Another use of money in the New Testament was to care for the poor. We know this because of many passages. One particular passage stands out. In Galatians 2, Paul recounts going to Jerusalem to affirm he had not run in vain. Upon receiving the right hand of fellowship from Peter, John and James, they asked him to remember the poor which he says he was also eager to do. This must have been a value of the church culture to be the only thing of note that was requested by the leaders at Jerusalem.

Another use of our money in the New Testament is to support those who sow spiritually into our lives by sowing material things into theirs. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Notice there is no compulsion here or percentage rate to give. It is also a transaction between people and not through an institution. We can conclude from a thorough reading of the New Testament that there is no tithe instructed. There is no



giving to an institution instructed. There is a giving up of our own possessions in order to share with others. There is a free sharing of resources among the church. There is an instruction to use our money to care for the poor. If we desire to honor God with our wealth, we should do it in the way we see it done in the Bible.

## **Chapter Six**

### **The Congregation**

How has the institutionalization of the church affected the people of God? This is a controversial question to explore. Many people have never experienced Christianity apart from the institution. Many of these people have fond memories or good experiences in the institution. This makes this discussion harder because many have no other frame of reference. Imagine sleeping in your cave on a smooth rock. It is all you have ever known. That is where cavemen and cave women sleep.

If a traveler from a different place came and told you that everything about your sleeping arrangements was hurting you, you might find it hard to accept. I mean, everyone does it, right? This traveler proceeds to tell you about beds and central heat and air conditioning. It all sounds made up to you. You have no context. Now this traveler tells you about the health benefits of sleeping better. You didn't even know you were hurting from your rock. You have always felt this way. You struggle to try to figure out what it will look like when you leave the cave. You have no context or frame of reference so it's all speculative. A fear grips you. What if it is all bad and this traveler is wrong. I could lose my cave and have no place to sleep. Many cave dwellers never leave the discomfort of their caves to find a better rest.

For us it is different. We are not being told to go to some distant fantasy land. We are being called back to something that once existed and has been abandoned. We are not being asked to leave what we have always known for something that has

never existed. We have stories of others who left the institution of their day. The early disciples were faced with the same conflict. All they had ever known was the temple and synagogue systems of their day. It is where the children of God gathered. They saw God working there. They had experienced God working in others through the system. It is where they first found God. But just as it is today, men had added many things to God's instructions. Jesus challenged them to leave the system and follow Him. He's challenging you to do the same today.

We have instructions from God on how to do church His way. We have chosen the man-made sepulchers over the dwelling of Him who does not live in temples built by human hands. We have left many things behind in our departure. Many useful and beneficial things. As we examine these things, please remember. We are going back to the way things used to be. We are going back to God's design for His church and His people.

I have heard some ask if we have the freedom to do church how we see fit. This is a very relevant question for this discussion. In answering this question we must keep some things in mind. First, we must decide if we have the right to supersede God's instructions for His church. In other words, if God has given us instruction for how the church is to be designed in structure and function, do we have the right to change that? My simple answer is a resounding no. If we have the right to change God's instructions then His instructions are nothing but suggestions. If God's directions are suggestions, then there is no instruction in Scripture. All we must do is change the instructions we don't like. This leaves God powerless to lead His church or His people. Jesus said it well in John 14:15 where He said if you love me, obey my commands.

Another thing to consider when changing God's instructions for the church is whether we are making things better or worse. Even in areas where we may not find clear teaching, there is a danger to produce a harmful result. God's instructions work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. When we tweak one thing it may affect other things negatively. One example of this is the instruction on the use of spiritual gifts in the assembly of the saints. If we no longer allow all the spiritual gifts to freely operate in our church services, we run the risk of causing negative effects.

The use of our spiritual gifts when we gather is much deeper than it may first appear. There are several effects of the free working of the gifts. One is that it allows the Holy Spirit to manifest to the body of believers and to thereby lead the church. When man-made rules or methods interfere with the free working of spiritual gifts, it can grieve the Holy Spirit. The gifts are designed by God and distributed to the members in order to minister Christ. We don't need better sermons, more lights, drums and better music. We need the free-flowing manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the spiritual gifts of the believers. When we trade one for the other, we harm the intended purpose of the spiritual gifts in the gathering.

Another intended purpose of spiritual gifts in the gathering is to bring balance and unity. Reading 1 Corinthians 12 gives us a picture of how God structures the church when we follow His design. He distributes gifts as He sees fit. He does this to build up the body and bring unity. He bestows honor on those who lack it. When we change the way we do church, as is done in the institution, we also risk interfering with God's work through

the spiritual gifts of the believers. This can have far reaching and long-lasting negative effects on the people of God.

I meet many Christians who have little understanding of their spiritual gifts. They have taken a test and filed the results away as a neat notion. Many others have never been taught about spiritual gifts or their role in the church or the growth of the kingdom. The spiritual gifts are an extremely important part of the Christian faith. It is a part that has been diminished greatly by the institution. The spiritual gifts are mentioned throughout the New Testament. They are gifts given to you by God Himself. Would you treat a great gift from a friend in such a way? The gifts are real, powerful and essential to the proper functioning of the church. We cannot return to God's design for His church unless we first embrace the importance of spiritual gifts. Any change that negatively impacts the free use of the spiritual gifts will also bring harm to God's people.

Another negative effect of the institution on the congregation is the practice of church membership. There is no indication in the New Testament that there ever existed a system of church membership. We see reference to letters of introduction or warnings against associating with certain people. All of this is far from the elaborate membership systems we see at work in today's institution. The requirements for these membership rituals vary from church to church. Some will only allow in those baptized by their church. Others require multi-week classes. Some require membership oaths and pledges of support and agreement. All of this is designed by man to control the congregation.

I understand that the first century church was not as transient as today. The need to verify that someone has accepted Jesus as

their Lord and has been baptized is harder today. Today's institution goes even farther with church membership than just the initial entry into the church. Because it violates the clear teaching of Scripture by allowing unbelievers into the worship gathering, it must separate rights and responsibilities through membership. The church is designed by God to be a gathering of believers. The institution allows everyone to gather in the worship assembly. This creates a problem when making decisions. The institution does not want these unbelievers deciding church issues. The answer in most cases turns into an institutional caste system of Christianity.

The Christian institutional caste system separates the body of Christ based on several factors. The caste system is not the same in every church but usually looks something like this. We have the leadership which is usually an elder board led by the main pastor. Next is the professional clergy. Then comes the lay (unpaid) leaders. Just below that is the members. Some divide the members into two classes. We have tithing members and other members. Followed by regular attending Christians, occasionally attending Christians and unbelievers. Each of these classes of church gatherers have different rights and responsibilities. Leaders are aware of the secret things of the church. Only members can vote on issues of the church. For some, only tithing members are eligible to be lay leaders or elders. Every institution develops its own caste system. This is not a complete list of potential castes but it does give you an idea of the system.

The membership system is not outlined in scripture. Instead, we see that the church wrestled through issues. There were divisions among them and Paul even says those divisions were necessary. One issue created by the Christian caste system is

that it destroys unity. It places more value on those that comply with the man-made systems. How can the church attain unity when it divides itself in these ways? There are certain spiritual gifts that give some believers great insight and ability to bring wisdom and leadership advice. How can tithing or attending classes make you more able to make leadership decisions? The modern institution has left God's design for His people and developed their own way. God's way allowed the Holy Spirit to lead through spiritual gifts. Man's way allows men to lead through compliance with their rules and systems. God's design brings unity and balance to the church through His distribution and operation of spiritual gifts. The institution values obedience to their rules and rewards leaders with more honor.

The last negative effect on the congregation that we will discuss here is that of segregation. The institution is designed to control and appeal. In an effort to do both, it has segregated the congregation. Within the same church we may see children's church, youth services, traditional church and contemporary services. We separate the children from the adults and the singles from the marrieds. The modern institution has become an expert at division. There is hardly anything left that cannot be separated into its own segment of the church. All of this is a fairly modern invention.

I have explored this topic in depth in previous books. Here I am just discussing the harm caused by this practice. I see our society carrying the effects of these practices. It has become hard for people raised in our segregated society to interact with anyone that is not in their people group. By segregating in such ways, our kids grow up without knowing how to interact with the elderly. We have lost something as a church and in our society due to the extreme segregation we place our children

under from birth through adulthood.

God's design for the church resembles a family. Due to the rise of the institution, we see larger and larger gatherings. We no longer meet in homes so our gatherings take on the characteristics of the gathering places. What was designed to be the gathering of a new extended family has now become a large production. This type of gathering requires control in a different way. When we leave the institution, we return to the family. When we return to the family, we will see amazing results. Our kids will learn to respect their elders. Our young moms will be more supported by the older women. The young men will learn to lead by the example of the older men. How can we raise up leaders when we separate our youth and place them under those only a few years older?



## **Chapter Seven**

### **The Effects on the Gospel**

I first heard the Gospel presented to me as a sinner who needed to be saved from hell. I was thirteen at the time and I was very aware I was not a good person. So after I accepted the free gift, my ticket to heaven, I wanted to know what was next. The answer was of course to go to church. This was my introduction to the institution. I had my ticket and now I needed to come here every Sunday and learn until I got to cash in my free gift of salvation. I am sure that many of you reading this can share a similar testimony.

The problem for me started when I went to church. It felt uncomfortable, unnatural, even weird. The expectation was for me to be changed by Jesus until I fit in the church. I may not have been told this directly or in those words, but it was clearly communicated in word and action. The comments and looks were cutting. I think many of these people did not realize how their words were being received. It was as if they had all made it and I was not there yet.

As I got older and learned more about Jesus and His teachings, the uncomfortable feelings did not subside. I was being transformed, but not into “them”. So I started questioning the way the Gospel was presented to me. What I found fascinates me to this day. The Gospel presented to me was never preached by Jesus - NEVER! There is not one sermon recorded in Scripture where Jesus tells people that they obtain heaven through accepting the Gospel and repenting of their sins. Jesus didn't preach it and neither did the apostles.

Don't get me wrong. It is a correct teaching but it is not the Gospel they preached. Go look for yourself. I will wait here until you get back. Did you find it? What did the Gospel of Jesus and the apostles promise for repentance? It promised the promise. The promise is the return of the Holy Spirit and thus the entering of the Kingdom of God. Heaven is the end result, but it is not the promise. The Holy Spirit is the promise and getting the promise wrong is a huge deal.

How did we move from the Gospel of the Kingdom, which Jesus and the apostles preached, to the Gospel of heaven that is preached today? My opinion is that the institution moved us there. The Gospel of the Kingdom puts the focus of your salvation onto sacrificial service to the kingdom. When you receive the Holy Spirit, it is so you can be a witness (Acts 1:8). It gives you power to engage the mission. It does not instruct us to go to church. Receiving the Gospel of the Kingdom makes us a part of the church automatically. This power tore down the early church institution. It caused the apostles to be accused of turning the whole world upside down (Acts 17:6). The Kingdom of God does not fit well into an institution.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God does not produce church members. It produces radical, spirit filled and powerful ministers that are on a mission to witness Christ to the world. The institution has little room for this kind of Christian. The goal of the institution is to grow and sustain the institution. The goal of God is to redeem the whole world. So along the way we saw a change in how the Gospel was presented. The response became, go to church instead of go into all the earth and be willing to suffer and die for the mission of Jesus. Which Gospel were you presented with? Which Gospel are you living?

The hard part about this discussion is that the Gospel of heaven is true. If you want to go to heaven then you must accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior by repenting of your sins. While this is true, it is not truth. Truth is the whole story. When we leave out parts of the whole story, we change the story. Remember Paul's warnings to the Galatians.

Gal 1:8 NASB95 - But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Is it possible that you have received a Gospel that is contrary to what Paul preached? The direction of the Gospel of the Kingdom is to go and make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). The direction of the Gospel of Heaven is to go to church, serve in the church, help grow the church and financially support the church while you learn about the Bible. We do this until you get to heaven.

I do believe that this other Gospel has contributed greatly to the current decline of Christianity in America. It has led us to focus on sin. It consumes our attention on our sin and other people's sin. It is what Jesus came to do right? He came to fix your sin problems. We are not supposed to tolerate sin right? Once again true but not truth. The Good News of the Gospel is that the Holy Spirit can be restored to you. Adam was cut off from God in the garden and Jesus came to deliver the Spirit back to us. Even better news is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. God does not desire sinless people. Just read the Bible. The greatest stories of faith are filled with sinful people. God wants obedient people who are yielded to Him. This is only possible through the Holy Spirit. If you think you can

achieve a position of having no sin while on this earth, you should heed the apostle John's warning.

1Jo 1:8 NASB95 - If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

When I approach someone from the position that they are a sinner, I appear judgmental. Most people don't see themselves as in need of a savior in spite of their condition. This has caused the world to view Christians as both self-righteous and hypocrites. As you read the Scriptures, I want you to notice that as the apostles come upon new people that claim to be disciples, they never ask them if they are going to heaven when they die. They always ask them if they have received the Holy Spirit.

Something most people don't know is that they are cut off from God. I have never met a sinner that could express a closeness and intimacy with God. This includes those professing their ticket to heaven. This is universally known by mankind. They try hundreds of ways to find God's presence. False religions rely on this deep desire in order to survive. They have to look to these other ways because all we talk about is sin. The removal of sin is not the deep desire of most people.

Connecting with God is a built-in desire for all of mankind. It's time we start talking about the restoration of the Holy Spirit as the result of accepting Jesus. It is not only true, it is truth and it is the only thing that can fill the void left in mankind by the sin of Adam. This is why Jesus preached this and why it is the Gospel He passed down to the disciples.

The rise of the Gospel of heaven came with the rise of the

institution. It also creates many problems. It puts the focus of the Christian life on attending the institution. This is something we never see in the New Testament after the resurrection. It takes the focus off of the supernatural empowerment to be witnesses for Jesus. The institution has created a Sunday evangelistic meeting to replace the gathering described in the New Testament. Church members are taught to bring people to the institution to hear the pastor preach. The gathering of people to the institution is the primary goal in many churches.

As the church continues to decline in America, we see the institution scrambling to get people out of the building. Now we want them sharing their faith. This is not how they were told it would work. They were told to come be a part of the institution. Let the pastor preach the Gospel. Now that fewer people are attending their services, we see them trying to shift the focus. This is like a bait and switch for many. It is like they are expecting them to go when the focus of the Gospel they received was to come to church.

Another by-product of the Gospel of heaven may have been quite unintentional and unforeseen. This Gospel is a pride builder. Once you have successfully assimilated into an institution, there is a sense of pride and accomplishment. You made it, you're in! I have seen this pride rear its ugly head many times. There is a pride in our institutions. We subdue the manifestations of our sin so we can fit in, but inwardly we are a wreck. It is not a healthy thing. It causes good people to look down on others. It is Pharisaical in nature. Consider the story found in Luke 18:9-14. Good church members are praised for following the rules of man, serving the church and paying tithes. It is a sort of peer pressure to follow the institution. Meanwhile the things that really matter are not applauded.

There is very little accountability to be a witness, sacrifice for others, serve the poor or use our spiritual gifts.

If we leave the institution without correcting our Gospel then the institution will soon again overtake us. This has been the result for centuries. Look to history to see what has happened to the movements of revival and reformation that started outside the institution. They have, for the most part, been overtaken by the institution.

## **Chapter Eight**

# **Spiritual Warfare, Strongholds and Our Struggle With Sin**

In the beginning of the New Testament church, we see rapid growth, unity, sacrifice for others and a display of miracles in the public square as the Gospel is preached. We have come a long way from that start. In today's institutional church we have seen rapid decline, a rise in division, the prosperity gospel and very little display of power in the public square. The institution has brought everything “in house” so to speak.

The Protestant Reformers quickly adopted the position of Pastor as leader of the local church. The Bible had been withheld from the common person for centuries. The invention and propagation of the printing press made wide spread distribution of the Bible possible. Many translations of the Bible came from this era. It is easy to understand how learning the book became such a big deal. Intellectualism soon became the gauge by which spiritual maturity was measured. We had left obeying the instructions of Scripture for the study of Scripture.

The canonization of the Bible brought a new element to the faith. The early church had only the Old Testament writings and some of the letters from the apostles. The rise of intellectualism that was fueled by the Age of Science and Reason also affected the church. The Christian faith in its institutional form had become a practice of study and hearing a preacher. As time went on, we strayed farther and farther from our roots to embrace the institution. Maybe this is what John was referring to in Revelations chapter 2 when he told the

church at Ephesus they had left their first love. His warning to them also stands as a warning to us today.

Rev 2:5 NASB95 - "Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-unless you repent.

By now, some of you might be asking yourself, why is this a bad thing? I'm glad you asked. At its very core, Christianity is about faith not intellectualism. This makes it the most universally accessible religion on the planet. There is no minimum education level needed. Anyone can access Christ by faith. When we intellectualize Christianity, we place a new bar in front of people. For some it is a stumbling block. The Bible emphasizes God's wisdom over man's. It places a higher priority on the things of the Spirit and the power of the Spirit. Christianity is a spiritual encounter with God, not His book. The power of transformation does not come from our learning the book, but rather from the God we experience as we engage His living and active words through obedience.

All of this has led us to a very dangerous place today. The statistics are clear. In America, very few regular church attenders ever share their faith. They also display a very poor grasp of basic theology. Our pursuit of intellectual attainment has led us to the exact opposite result. We are creating a culture of biblically illiterate Christians. We no longer teach people to be a disciple and more importantly, to make other disciples. The majority of our Christian activities take place in our buildings. The emphasis is largely on learning and not on obeying Scripture. The focus of obedience is often on the church rules and guidelines not the commands of Christ.



Instead of church being the place where supernaturally gifted Christ followers manifest the power of the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body (Eph. 4:16), we have turned to experts. This turning to experts has impacted many parts of the institution. We don't teach on the mission. We teach in a classroom. We hire teachers and pastors to lead and train us. We do not teach people how to get free from sin and stay that way so we increasingly turn to professional counselors. Even the music in our services is led more and more by professionals. May God have mercy on us for ignoring His clear teaching of Scripture.

We have begun to value the natural abilities of our professionals over the supernatural abilities of each other. This has led to a rise of false prophets in the institution. It appears that many can say anything without recourse as long as it is what their followers want to hear. Our 2020 election cycle is proof of that. The concept of prophecy has become so distorted these days. It is robbing us of one of God's most powerful gifts for leading His church.

All of this leaves the average person in the church confused and powerless. I meet many Christians each year. I find very few that understand their spiritual gifting, I meet even fewer that know how to walk in it and use it. I am often referred to people by others as someone that can help them with their demons or sin problems. What a shame. Every Christian should be equipped to do these things. You can memorize the armor of God, but it won't help you unless you put it on.

Our emphasis on learning has not increased our power. Our emphasis on professionals has diminished it. We have replaced

the power of a spirit transformed person preaching the Gospel in the public square for the invitation to church to see the pastor preach. We need to bring balance back into the church. We need to equip the saints for the works of ministry not the running of an institution.

By now you might be thinking that this guy hates the Bible and education. That is not true. I am trying to express the danger of emphasizing learning over obeying. Jesus said if you love Him, you would obey His commands. In another passage He makes this point even more clear.

John 3:36 NASB95 - "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Is it possible that many are under God's wrath at this time in history for failing to obey what they have read? Our victory over sin comes from understanding our position in Christ and obeying His commands. Have you been taught how Satan works against you? Have you been taught how to consecrate yourself? Have you been taught how to make disciples and teach them to make disciples? Perhaps we should all stop striving to learn more and start trying to obey what we already know.

## **Chapter Nine**

# **Refocusing on the Vineyard, Spreading Salt and Shedding Light in Our Communities**

How do we deinstitutionalize our faith? I have a disciple that gave me the clearest answer to this question. He said stop doing everything that is not found in Scripture and only do the things that are found in Scripture. That makes it sound easy, but it's not. We have all been institutionalized. We must intentionally deprogram our view of Christianity. We cannot do this a piece at a time. It is a wholesale change of behavior and priority. It requires a paradigm shift.

In the latter chapters of this book, I will give you some big picture ideas to help you in this process. Your daily instructions are clear in Scripture – obey Christ's commands. In Matthew 28:18-20 He commands the making of disciples of all the nations. This command also says we are to teach them to obey all His commands and baptize them. Whoops! What? We are to baptize them? That is not what our church taught us. Welcome to deinstitutionalization. We are commanded to baptize. The institution tells us that only the clergy can baptize. Are you ready for this truth? The need for professional clergy to baptize is all simply made up by man as a tool of control. God never ordained it to be that way.

So let's shift some responsibilities around. You will no longer have the institution to do things for you that God instructed you to do. So are you ready to live as a mature Christian? Can you preach the Gospel of the Kingdom and not just talk about sin and heaven? Can you teach basic doctrine? Do you know how Satan works and how to defeat him? Do you understand the

way the Holy Spirit works, spiritual gifts and the baptism of the Holy Spirit? What about communion? You must rediscover what Scripture says about all of these things. The institution has distorted these things. You can no longer rely on what you have been taught by the institution. You must go back to the book and learn everything new again. This way you will be able to teach others with confidence.

The next big shift will be in how you grow the church. The modern American institution has built a system of outreach, programs and events in order to attract people to the institution. The hope is that they will eventually find Jesus in the church service as the professional preaches. Stop it. This is not God's design and we see nothing like it in Scripture. We must learn to serve others. We must seek the lost in prayer. We must learn to walk aware in the Holy Spirit of God given opportunities to preach the Gospel. These modern methods of ministry have led us to a historical decline in church participation. You are not giving up anything that works here. You are getting in line with God's design.

This was a secret to Jesus' success in ministry. He left these words to encourage us to do as He did. We find them in John 5:19.

John 5:19 NASB95 - Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless [it is] something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

If you want to see power in your ministry just do what Jesus is doing and do it the way He is doing it.

How does someone become a Christian without coming to church first? The same way they always have. They respond to the preaching of the Gospel and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior through repentance. Paul outlines the process in Romans 10:14-15. He references a preacher here and the institution would want you to associate this word with the office of pastor. There is no biblical basis for such an association. This refers to anyone that proclaims the Gospel. If you want to see people saved, you must GO and preach the Gospel.

If you want to understand God's design for His children, you must start at the beginning. God gave Adam and Eve a command before they fell to sin in the garden. It can be found in Genesis 1:28. We are designed to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and rule over it. This desire to be fruitful is placed in us by God. One result of having the Holy Spirit is to desire fruitfulness. This command has never been rescinded or replaced. It is the original intent for man. We are to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it and rule over all the earth. We have fallen far short of fulfilling our commanded duty.

You can get started on fulfilling your responsibility today. Start where you live. Look at your neighborhood. Get to know the people. Pray for them. Clean up the place. Meet needs. Locate the widows, the orphans and the poor. Serve them. Pray for them. Be prepared to preach the Good News and see God confirm your preaching with miraculous signs. Gather those that respond to the Gospel and make disciples. Teach them to do what you are doing and repeat the process. God will expand your territory as He sees fit.

This is the Christian life. We are laborers in the vineyard of our Lord. We are spreading salt and shedding light everywhere we go. Once you begin this work you will gain new understanding of Scripture. You will begin to see how Satan has taken hold of your community and the residents. You can engage in spiritual warfare on their behalf. You will gain a new appreciation for the spiritual weapons that God has provided for us. Your faith will move from a passive institutional faith to a very active and obedient prophetic faith that flows from the living water that Christ has given you.

## **Chapter Ten**

# **Gathering Organically and By the Instructions**

If you follow the instructions from the previous chapter, you are now on the mission of Jesus to take back what was lost in the garden by Adam and Eve. You will start to make disciples and see people accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Now what? We left the institution so where do we go to church? You don't go to church anymore. You are the church. You never again make a service at a location on a set day of the week become the focus of your faith. Instead, you follow God's design for His church.

The Bible has a lot to say about what we are to do as the Body of Christ. It has much less to say about how we do it. We must return to Scripture and discover the guiding principles for the church. We need to rediscover how the church was designed to be structured and function. How do we decide who leads? What do deacons and elders really do and how do we select them? Who shares communion and how? How do we baptize and when? These and many other questions must be answered fresh from the Bible. The institution has distorted so many things.

I have spent many years on this rediscovery path. I have developed many tools and teachings to help you on this journey. They are all provided free of charge, as it should be. There are a few big picture principles to keep in mind. First, remember that the church operates and functions on the basis of spiritual gifts. These gifts are real supernatural enablements provided to each believer by God. Allowing the gifts to

function freely is crucial to allowing God to run the church.

To gain an understanding of these gifts and how they are designed to work you can refer to three sections of Scripture. These are not the complete theology or listing of spiritual gifts but they are a great starting point. Look at Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14. As you will quickly see, getting an understanding of spiritual gifts is essential to God's design for His church.

So how do we get started? First things first. Only gather your disciples. Don't use invitation to build the church. Don't allow unbelievers to gather with you. This is a pure violation of God's design and the clear instruction of Scripture. It has become so common in the institution that many can't imagine a church without unbelievers. The truth is that no matter where an unbeliever spends their Sunday morning, they are not part of God's church until they receive Jesus through repentance.

When we gather, we should equip the saints for the works of ministry. Make disciples. Teach disciples to make disciples. Prepare them to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. Teach basic doctrine. Help them understand their spiritual gifts. Share a meal together. Pray for each other and meet every need. Then put the focus on the mission. Take your disciples out into the community to serve together. Don't teach anything in a classroom that can be taught out on the mission. Show them by example. This is the pattern and instruction of the Bible.

In order to get you started, I collected a sampling of Scriptures for you. I started after Pentecost. The giving of the Holy Spirit was a key to understanding the church the Spirit builds. I am only focused on the things they did together as the church.



Acts 2:44-47 - And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Act 4:23 NASB - When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Act 4:31 NASB - And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

Act 4:32 NASB - And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

Act 4:33 NASB - And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

Act 4:34 NASB - For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales

Act 4:35 NASB - and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

Act 5:12 NASB - At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico.

Act 5:13 NASB - But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem.

Act 5:14 NASB - And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number,

Act 5:42 NASB - And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Act 6:1-4 NASB - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Act 8:14-16 NASB - Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For He had not yet fallen

upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Act 9:31 NASB - So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.

Act 11:21-23 NASB - And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord. The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch. Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;

Act 11:27-30 NASB - Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.

Act 12:5 NASB - So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

Act 13:1-3 NASB - Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While

they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Act 14:27 NASB - When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

Act 15:3-4 NASB - Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.

Act 15:35-36 NASB - But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and preaching with many others also, the word of the Lord. After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are."

Act 18:11 NASB - And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Act 19:17-19 NASB - This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in

the sight of everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

Act 20:7 NASB - On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

These references along with the chapters cited earlier regarding spiritual gifts should give you a good starting place for your gatherings.

## **Chapter Eleven**

# **Guarding Against the Institutional Effects**

## **Takes Intentionality**

In order to prevent the institution from retaking our churches we must be intentional. Here are just a few of the institutional effects on Christianity and how to avoid them.

**Corporate Structure** – Avoid incorporating your church. The church as described in the Bible is not a corporation. It has no tax-exempt status. Without the corporate structure, your church cannot own property or hire professional clergy. If you choose to form a corporation for your church you are now an institution.

**Professional Clergy** – It is biblical to sow material things to those who sow spiritually into your life (1Cor. 9:11). This principal is a far stretch from the current system of paid professional clergy and the plethora of “pastor positions” in the modern institution. The hiring of professional clergy subverts the idea of a priesthood of all believers. It also resembles the cursed priesthood found in Ezekiel chapter 44.

**Proof-texting** – This is the practice of taking a previously held belief and finding a passage of scripture to support the belief. Many in the church, including pastors, have never read the Bible. This results in taking passages out of context. Sometimes a multitude of meanings are given to a passage that really only has one contextual meaning. The way to avoid and correct this practice is simple. Rightly divide the Word of Truth! Take into account context, culture, writing styles and type of writing such as poetry, allegory, apocalyptic or

prophetic language, etc... If you find yourself trying really hard to prove a point, you should reexamine your point.

**Doctrinal Statements** – The statement of faith or doctrinal statement is one of the most divisive tools of the modern institution. The early church had no such thing. These tools are so common that most Christians will not even consider attending a church service until they can examine their doctrinal statement. The purpose of the doctrinal statement is to define what you must believe to be a part of this church. They drive us to separate over differences of opinion. Their reasoning sounds good. Doctrine is important to the institution. Paul told the Corinthians (1Cor. 11) that divisions among them will make those who are approved more evident. The early church did not rely on statements or creeds to protect sound doctrine. They relied on the manifest power of the Holy Spirit working through those that were approved by God. There is no statement of doctrine used by Jesus or the early church. It was first used after the church was institutionalized. The Gospel is the seed. All of our major doctrines should be explained by our Gospel. Everything else that is debatable should not be divided over.

**Passive Man-led Worship** – Avoid a passive gathering with your disciples. Start everyone off with the understanding that they are expected to participate in the gathering. Incorporate the mission into your regular gatherings.

1Cor 14:26 NASB95 - What is [the outcome] then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

There is a growing group of people that are not content with supporting another person's ministry. They are seeking an authentic expression of their faith through active service to God. Your gathering should provide that for them.

**Intellectual in Nature** – The Christian faith is not designed to be an intellectual pursuit. It is meant to be an active walk with a supernatural God. Don't make your gathering about learning without accountability for obedience. Make sure to make going out on mission and integral part of every gathering.

**The Pulpit** – The entire concept of the pulpit comes straight out of pagan culture. Having a pulpit places the authority and emphasis on the one at the pulpit. If you choose to have a pulpit you will find it more difficult to experience the free-flowing spirit led worship gathering that God intends.

**Building or Location Centered** – Mix it up. Meet at different places. Meet outdoors when possible. Meet from house to house. The institution has trained us that growing the church is the goal. The larger your gathering becomes, the higher the risk of falling back into an institution. You can safeguard from this by keeping your gatherings small. Split up and start new gatherings as you grow. Unite on the mission to help build unity. How different would it be if every block in your community had an organic gathering of believers that were focused on loving their neighbors?

**Handling Money** – Avoid the tithe. The tithe is a purely Old Testament concept imposed by God to support the Levitical Priests and the temple system. It is never taught after the resurrection of Jesus and there is no New Covenant temple system to support.



Act 17:24 NASB95 - "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Deacons handle money for the church. Pick a trustworthy person and allow them to handle money for you. No, you will not have tax exemption but you will have much more money to do real ministry now that you are not paying salaries or buying and maintaining buildings. Use your money to eliminate all need among your disciples and then minister to your community.

There are many other areas you will need to explore and discover in the Bible. What an exciting time for you. You have now been set free from the institution and are ready to discover God's design for His church.

## Appendix Helpful Resources

I have been on this journey for many years. Over that time God has taught us many things. I encourage you to enjoy the journey and learn as you go. I have assembled a lot of training materials to help you on your journey. Here is a partial list and where you can access them.

Tools available at [www.sunministries.org](http://www.sunministries.org)

**The Gospel of the Kingdom** – A short video presentation of the Gospel and an accompanying PDF diagram. This will help you teach people how to share the Gospel of the Kingdom.

**Daily Devotionals** – There are devotionals to help people learn how to get free from sin, become fruitful, rest in ministry and heal from the pain of their past.

### **Books –**

Disciple Driven Church – The Coming Reformation – print and audio

Being the Church – print and audio

Disciple Makers Handbook – print

**Podcast** – The Resistance Radio Show

### **Online Courses -**

Breaking Free – A self-guided course to help you break free from the strongholds of the enemy.

Healing from the Pain of Your Past – A self-guided exploration of how to heal from past pain and abuse

Other tools are added as they become available.

<http://www.thechurchatmovement.org>

This is an organic expression of the churches that have been born out of our disciple multiplying ministry. It offers an alternative to the institution. It is an example of how churches can be both independent and connected. It shows how we can unite around vision and values without doctrinal statements or denomination. It also contains videos and testimonies from people that have left the institution to rediscover God's design.

Our leadership team travels around the country and offers training events for those interested in leaving the institution and learning to multiply disciples outside that system. These training events are listed on the above websites.

Dr. Terry Goodwin is the founder and Executive Director of Sun Ministries. He has been married to his wife, Suzette for 38 years. Together they have raised 5 children. As the empty nest approaches they find themselves ministering together in one of the poorest and most devastated areas of North St. Louis.

I was raised outside the religious system of America. After accepting Christ, I tried to fit into the church system that was presented to me. The more I learned, the more I began to question the practices that I could not find supported in Scripture.

In every generation there are some that hear the voice of God calling them to change the course. This book is a call to change course. It is not a call to veer away from God but rather to throw o- the things that have steered the ship of God's church towards the rocks. It is time for us to look at the practices of the past in light of Scripture, to hold fast to what is good and to throw o- that which hinders the bride of Christ from being what it was.



If you are interested in learning more you can contact me by email at [terry@sunministries.org](mailto:terry@sunministries.org)