

Gathering Together With The Lord

A Biblical Pattern for Believers' Meetings

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Preface

The material I am presenting here is primarily directed toward those whom God has called and raised up to be servant/leaders in the Body of Christ. Because of this, I feel it's only fair to give you a little background information on myself, so that you, the reader, can know a bit about who I am and where I'm coming from as I share what the Lord's put on my heart.

Almost from the beginning of my walk with Jesus, the Lord has used me as a leader, in one form or another. Whether teaching a Sunday school class, leading a home group, serving as worship leader, youth minister, or sharing from the pulpit, for almost 40 years I've been trying to follow Him through the challenges, disappointments, and joys that accompany this adventure we know as "serving the Lord."

Before coming to the Lord, as a boy my family and I attended a Lutheran church. Since surrendering my life to the Lord in 1969, over the years I have attended and served in four different Pentecostal/charismatic style churches, from denominational (Assemblies of God) to independent. In my travels I've also visited numerous other churches, either as a visitor or for guest ministry. So it is safe to say that I have participated in many different types of church services and other gatherings, both as a congregant and a leader.

Recently, the Lord began to draw my attention to 1 Corinthians chapter 14, and specifically to verses 26-33. The more I pondered this passage, the more I began to question why the kind of service described there is so rarely seen today. I wondered whether this pattern ought to be more the norm than the exception. This led to a desire to learn more about how these instructions should and could be implemented, and the end result of that study is what is presented before you now.

I also feel it's only fair to warn you that some of what you'll read may seem radical, perhaps even shocking. Even so, try to keep an open mind as you read and ask the Lord to confirm the validity of these principles to your own heart. While you may disagree with some of my conclusions and methods of applying them, the underlying principles must be contended with. My desire is to simply share what I believe the Lord has shown me with other leaders. My hope is that you, too, will be challenged to re-examine some long-held traditions which, I firmly believe, are robbing the church of the fullness of His will, and the fullness of His presence in our midst.

Chapter 1 - Historical Perspective

Since the days of Martin Luther and the Reformation, God has been restoring many foundational truths to His Church--truths which became unknown and unpracticed during the darkness of the Middle Ages: Justification by faith, water baptism, the baptism in the Holy Spirit and His gifts, holiness, healing, faith, the full acceptance of the five-fold ministries (especially prophet and apostle) as operating today...these truths have been or are presently being restored to the Body of Christ, as part of God's plan to make us a beautiful Bride for His Son, without spot or wrinkle.

One vital component of this work is the restoration of a more Biblical pattern or model for our meetings--those times when we gather together in His name to meet with and glorify our heavenly Father. Though the Bible only gives us brief glimpses into this aspect of early Christian life, most notably in the book of Acts and in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, it is nonetheless clear that meeting and sharing together, and the strong sense of community it afforded, had the highest priority for the newly-born church. Acts 2:42-47 records that at the very beginning believers met every day, either in the temple or in each others' homes. Their "services" consisted of being taught by the Apostles, enjoying fellowship meals with each other, sharing the Lord's Supper together, and prayer (vs. 42).

By the time Paul wrote his first letter to the church in Corinth (around 54 AD, some 20 years later) these gatherings had evolved. What Paul describes in chapter 14 are meetings where every believer was free to participate and share what he or she believed the Lord had given them, for the good of all present. This was a significant change from those first meetings in Acts where everyone looked to the Apostles to teach and otherwise minister. As the new believers matured in the Lord, it is not at all surprising that they would desire to be used of the Lord and participate more in the ministry. Clearly, the principle whereby five-fold ministers are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, later elucidated by Paul in Ephesians 4:11, was beginning to be implemented during this period of the early church.

It's equally clear from Church history, however, that this format did not continue. As time went on, those who were recognized or appointed as leaders gradually took increasing control of the meetings, perhaps either for their own purposes or because church members began to participate less. Whatever the reason, the result is that today the vast majority of church services consist of a select few "professionals" who perform most of the work necessary to conduct a service, while the congregation's participation is largely scripted and of a minimal nature. In churches where some form of home meetings have been incorporated, these gatherings are usually more informal in structure, but these, too, are directed for the most part by designated leaders.

Based on the historical facts, I believe we can only conclude that this move away from following the 1 Corinthians 14 pattern represents nothing less than yet another area of spiritual regression for the Church. Just as other foundational truths were gradually "lost" to the Church as it descended into the Dark Ages, so also was this one.

Church history also reveals that, at various times and places, the Lord has sovereignly moved to implement a more Biblical pattern among a particular group of His children (see addendum A for a description of a recent one). When the spark of revival ignited fires of holy passion for the Lord in the church, there were often periods when the traditional forms of worship were put aside in favor of letting the Spirit have His way. Even so, it seems clear that these situations were and are the exception rather than the rule.

It is my strong conviction that the Lord is moving in these days to "shake that which can be shaken" in the sphere of our meetings, in order to re-establish His plan for them. The burgeoning

cell group movement is a major indicator of the shift in focus and practice which He is now bringing about within the worldwide body of Christ. More and more believers are discovering the transforming power of committing to a small fellowship community which meets, not in some huge and often impersonal edifice, but in the intimacy of a home. It is here where I believe the Lord is moving to fully restore His kingdom principles.

Every denomination and independent local church has developed and implemented a particular format for their Sunday services. Within the cell group movement there are also many different formats and concepts regarding how to conduct such meetings. Each format is obviously satisfying and effective to some degree, else it would not remain in use. We are now, however, entering a season where the Lord is challenging us to acknowledge a critical truth about these formats: the degree to which any meeting does not conform to the Biblical model, to that degree will it not fully achieve its divine potential and its God-ordained purposes. As an example, if I were to ask you to bake a cake without a recipe, you might end up baking something, but it won't likely look or taste as good as one made by a bakery chef who knows what to do. What if the Lord really does have a "recipe" for our gatherings? If, as I now believe, He does have a preferred format, shouldn't we attempt to discover and follow it?

Whatever purposes and goals we, as leaders, may develop and implement for our gatherings, we must be willing to examine them to determine if they are truly His purposes and goals.

Chapter 2 - Why We Gather

It is incumbent upon leaders to seek the Lord for answers to the "big" questions, and one of the biggest is, Why? Why do we gather together unto the Lord? Yes, I know it's because we are commanded to do so, but why did the Lord choose this method? He could have instituted any number of ways to fulfill His purposes for the Church. Yet in making this choice, the priority of His heart toward His people is revealed.

In Genesis 3:8 we read of Him "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," and can only imagine the delights of fellowship between the Creator and His highest creation, before the ugly breach of sin intervened. We hear His heart cry, longingly expressed through the mouth of His only Son, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."* (Mt. 23:37). And again, *"I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty."* (2 Cor. 6:16b-18).

Do you see it? Do you hear it? The Father's heart-felt desire is simply to be with His children. He delights to spend time with us. *"The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will renew you in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy."* (Zeph. 3:17).

This simple, yet profound truth is so often overlooked in our consideration of this subject. We tend to view our gatherings in a much more self-centered light, in terms of the blessings we legitimately can receive. Would we be so willing to meet without these blessings? Is it enough just to know how much we are blessing Him by our presence? *"Lord, help us to delight in You more than in what You do for us."*

The transcendent purpose of redemption was to purchase for Himself a "people for His own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). Not content to wait until we get to heaven, He commits Himself to show up whenever and wherever "two or more are gathered together" in His name (Mt. 18:20). Given all the other promises made concerning the abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit in our individual lives, why this added emphasis to our gatherings, if not to illustrate their priority? Though He truly dwells in every believer's heart, it is only when we are gathered together that "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23; 3:14-19) is made manifest. We experience His presence in far greater measure when two or more gather, than is possible as individuals.

His desire and commitment to meet with us is not without purpose, however. In Paul's grand exposition of God's eternal purposes recorded in Ephesians chapters 1 through 3, we see that the church has *"been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."* (Eph. 2:20-22). This process of fitting us together into a suitable earthly dwelling for His glory is the focus of His energy in every gathering, *"in order that the manifold wisdom of God might be made known **through the church** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."* (Eph. 3:10) [emphasis mine]. God wants to show the kingdom of darkness that He can take a sinful, selfish, and rebellious group of people, and solely by the working of His grace, redeem and transform them into a living union of souls who corporately represent and express the body of Christ on earth. This means that each individual part of His dwelling must be placed by Him where he or she belongs, and then be trained to faithfully fulfill the role of that part. *"You also,*

as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5). Each of our roles is inextricably tied to our gatherings because it is here that we are first exposed to the various gifts, anointings, and workings of the Spirit. It is here that we discover in what ways the Spirit desires to use us, and begin to learn how to cooperate with Him in His ministry through us.

In short, we ought to gather unto the Lord not simply out of obedience, but with the realization that He has sovereignly chosen this venue and greatly desires and delights to meet with us, and because the real work of fashioning us into "a dwelling of God in the Spirit" can only take place within this context.

Chapter 3 - The Case of Corinth

The church in Corinth had several problems which Paul wanted to address in his letter, and some of those problems concerned their meetings. He chastises them in chapter 11 for indulging in selfish gluttony during their love feasts, in chapters 12 and 13 he corrects their spiritual pride in over-emphasizing certain spiritual gifts, and in chapter 14 instructs them on how to have a proper Spirit-led church service. In doing so he provides us with a wonderfully concise description of these gatherings:

"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. If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

"But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner."
(1 Cor. 14:26-33, 40 NAS)

I truly believe that these instructions were included in the Bible because they constitute the pattern which God intended for us to follow when believers gather together. When Paul wrote, "for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, **as in all the churches** of the saints." [emphasis mine], we can infer that this pattern was also in place in other churches and gatherings of that era, not just at Corinth. Most striking, however, is the fact that we find no subsequent Biblical instructions which can be construed as amending or superceding those in this passage.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the pattern laid out so succinctly for us here in 1 Corinthians 14 should have been followed by the Church through the centuries--and that we should be following this pattern today.

We are all ministers

Throughout this century the Lord has been exposing and correcting the false distinction between so-called "professional" ministers and "laity" in the church. Prior to this it had simply been accepted as fact that only those with proper ministerial training and credentials could be considered ministers or be involved in ministry. This concept, as we now understand, is in complete contradiction to Ephesians 4:11 which declares that leaders are given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Every believer is called to become a minister in the sense that we all must learn to allow God to use us whenever and wherever He chooses, in order to bring the redemptive power of the gospel to whoever needs Him. Since there are multitudes who need the Lord (both in and out of the Church) this ministry can occur in very many places and very many ways. Although God has been restoring this truth for some time, there are still many churches whose members assume or expect that the Pastor is the one who does the work of ministry. Sadly, all too often the truth about this has not been taught because the pastor cannot or will not relinquish control over areas of ministry to those in his flock God wants to raise up to lead them.

My understanding is that God is continuing to work in His Church to re-structure it according to Ephesians 4:11, and that those individual churches which do not allow this to occur will ultimately fail. The Lord's desire is that we "all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to

the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:13) [emphasis mine]. This can only occur in churches where leadership is actively training their people to discover their gifts and ministry, and then releasing them to fulfill their destiny in God.

In the same way, I believe that God is now beginning to restore His pattern for our meetings. Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 14 is a far cry from the structure of our modern-day church services. While old-line denominational churches have long featured a tightly scripted liturgy, even those considered full-gospel, charismatic, or pentecostal have a fairly rigid service format consisting of praise & worship, sermon, and altar call. This "liturgy" is presented by those on the platform ("professionals") to the people ("laity") who are expected to simply follow along. There may be a few minutes allowed during worship for the occasional prophetic utterance or tongues/interpretation, but that is usually the extent of any congregational contributions to the service. Even home groups, with their inherent potential for greater flexibility, are most often required to adhere to an approved pre-determined agenda.

As we study the pattern found in 1 Corinthians 14, I believe you will see (as I have) that the Lord desires for every believer to participate in some way as we gather together with Him.

Chapter 4 - Understanding the Pattern

Verse 26: *When you assemble...*

There's no "if" here, echoing the familiar command of Hebrews 10:23-26 to not forsake gathering together. There are many reasons why Christians stop going to church, but in truth none of them are valid as excuses for disobedience. I have heard of believers who have become disgruntled with church as we know it today and have simply opted out. Whatever the reason, this decision brings a whole new set of problems associated with being a "lone ranger" Christian. The bottom line is that we all need each other, and those who feel they don't become easy targets for the enemy's deceptions. We are commanded to assemble, which means it is not an option, no matter how we may personally feel about our local church services.

Allow me to digress a moment to speak to those readers who are presently unhappy or dissatisfied with their church. If this is your situation, I want to strongly encourage you not to leave until you have first prayed and worked to change things. Don't simply criticize your Pastor, instead develop a caring relationship with him, pray for and with him, let him know you support him. This will allow you to share your concerns with him heart-to-heart, where he will likely be more inclined to hear what you are saying. God may desire to use you as a prophetic voice to help bring about changes. Do you want to short-circuit this because of a bad attitude and critical spirit? Don't hinder the message by being a hard-to-deal-with messenger.

If, on the other hand, God does release you from that church, go quietly and do not speak negatively in any way of that ministry or pastor. If people ask why you've left, simply tell them the Lord has led you elsewhere. As tempting as it may be to "enlighten" them about all that you believe is wrong there, don't do it. I have personally learned the hard way that speaking against a pastor or church opens the door for Satan to attack, and trust me, this is not something you want to experience.

Others may desire to leave their traditional church and start their own home or street church. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with that, I would strongly caution those who do this against becoming isolated from the rest of the local body of Christ. Because the Spirit is presently working to restore true unity in the Body, it is important to remain in fellowship with other pastors and local churches, even if you disagree with their style of worship or other peripheral issues. Each local assembly is part of a wider regional body of Christ, and each one needs the others in order for all to truly impact their area with the gospel. As Francis Frangipane put it in *The House of the Lord*, "it takes a city-wide church to win a city-wide war."

In addition, establishing relationships with other leaders provides an opportunity for some level of personal accountability, something which every true servant/leader needs and should desire.

Verse 26: *...each one...*

This is the crux of the Lord's pattern for our meetings. When we gather together, He desires that every believer should come prepared to participate in some way. Everyone should be ready and willing to be used by God to contribute something to that meeting which will glorify the Lord and minister to others. We are not supposed to come to church expecting the Pastor and other leaders to be prepared and ready to minister, and then simply sit back and watch them do their thing up there on the platform. Despite all their training and education (no matter how excellent), and all the anointing God may have equipped them with, they cannot, by themselves, replace or function in all the giftings and anointings that reside in every believer God has called to that local assembly.

The body of Christ is just that, a body, as Paul makes clear in the twelfth chapter of 1st Corinthians. And as such each member is vital to the proper functioning of it, with unique gifts, ministries, and anointings that no other member can duplicate or replace. While this truth has been accepted as it applies to other areas of service in the church (Sunday School, deacons, ushers, committees, etc.), we need to expand our view to see that it also applies to our gatherings as well.

"But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7) [emphasis mine]. This can only mean that the spiritual potential of our gatherings is diminished and unfulfilled to the degree that we do not allow the Spirit to move through each believer as He wills, so that they may make whatever special contribution He desires to use them for, all "for the common good." It is clear that most of our present service and home group formats are wholly inadequate with regard to this, allowing only a token amount of time and place (at best) for the Spirit to manifest Himself through the Body. Thus, the first issue to be faced is making room on our busy schedules for a regular meeting where the Holy Spirit is invited and expected to orchestrate the direction, focus, and content, and to do so through whomever He chooses to use. Secondly, we must begin equipping and training people so they will want to be used by the Spirit in this way, and will know how to cooperate with Him when He does.

It is my conviction that there is revelation knowledge and anointed ministry sorely needed by the body of Christ which is "unavailable" to us at present because the vessels through whom God has chosen to bring it have not been equipped and released to do so. He alone knows the extent to which this failure has hurt and weakened the Body of Christ. Those called to the "five-fold ministry" are charged with the responsibility of equipping the saints for this particular work of service (Eph. 4:12) no less than any other area of ministry.

It is my hope and prayer that this material may help move this training process along by challenging leaders (and every believer) to re-examine their God given roles and to begin functioning in them, for the glory of God and the building up of the Body of Christ, especially in this area of our gatherings.

I also want to make it very clear that I am not in any way suggesting that existing leadership is diminished or otherwise rendered unnecessary by this pattern. On the contrary, five-fold ministers are vitally important for the proper functioning of this type of gathering. They must exercise their God-given role of oversight during these meetings concerning what is said and done, and assist in facilitating an orderly flow of participation. I will have more to say about the role of leadership as we proceed.

Verse 26: *...each one has a psalm...*

Praise and worship are dear to the heart of God, so I believe it is no accident that it appears first in this list. The traditional approach has been to hire or appoint someone to lead the congregation in praise and worship, and they pick out the music for each meeting and usually sing and/or play an instrument. In home groups as well there is usually one designated worship leader. Here in this verse, however, we see that leading praise and worship should be open to whomever the Lord desires to use. In some churches, worship leaders have developed a team approach, meaning that they allow the members of their worship team to suggest songs during a service. In my experience this has opened up worship services to new directions and emphases that have had powerful results. There needs to be a way for others in our meetings to do this as well. I have found it helpful to encourage people to jot down the name of the song they feel the Lord has put on their heart and place it on my piano, or to lead out a cappella during an appropriate quiet moment.

The word "psalm" in this verse can represent all the various forms of praise and worship. Expanding on this in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul refers to "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." My understanding is that psalms are songs written directly from the scriptures, i.e. Bible verses set to music. Hymns can refer to any other type of song that has a scriptural topic. A spiritual song is "the song of the Lord," where the Holy Spirit leads someone to share a spontaneous new lyric and melody. In Psalm 150, we are instructed to praise God with instruments, instrumental music, and dance. All of these elements should be accepted and encouraged in our meetings so we may truly enter and enjoy the fullness of His presence through praise and worship.

Verse 26: ...each one...has a teaching...

Most pastors truly enjoy sharing the Word from their pulpit. And, indeed, there is undeniably something very special about giving forth an anointed word of the Lord and watching it impact powerfully those who are receiving it. So it is quite understandable that some leaders may have difficulty accepting that they are not always God's chosen vessel to bring a teaching during a particular meeting. Because of their training and the long entrenched expectations of church members, it may be a real challenge to break free of this mindset. Yet this verse is clear that God may and in fact often does desire to use others to teach during a meeting, even those whose only qualification is attendance in "The School of the Holy Spirit." Because we do not allow the Lord to use whomever He chooses we miss out on much specific Holy Spirit-directed teaching. I believe there are often specific truths which as few as even one person may need to hear, but because that particular truth doesn't really "fit" into the pastor's sermon outline that week, it goes unshared with the obvious unhappy consequences.

Are there any limitations on who may teach? Teaching involves explaining a truth from God's word that was learned by revelation, usually through study. Therefore, I believe the only requirement we should place on those who desire to bring a teaching is that they spend the time necessary to study and prepare.

But I also believe there are times when the Holy Spirit will give a revelation through this gift that is quite spontaneous, i.e. without the person having spent time studying for that purpose. During a meeting, the Lord may desire to bring a fresh understanding or emphasis of a certain truth, and even though the person has not prepared beforehand, they should be allowed to share it if that is how the Spirit is leading. This doesn't in any way negate the preparation requirement for those who want to teach, we should simply remain open to this kind of immediate revelation that the Spirit may give as we're together in His presence. These "pop-up teachings" often powerfully set free those who are struggling under the enemy's deceptions.

There are also times when this sort of revelation is not meant to be shared immediately, but rather used as a springboard for further study. This would generally be the case when what is received seems incomplete or just the beginning of an understanding. In my own experience, there have been many times when I've received a revelation during a meeting, taken it home, studied the Word in light of it, and developed a complete teaching to share at a later date.

What about the potential for false teaching? While the mere thought of this may give some leaders a good case of the willies, it can be handled in a straightforward manner, such as the following:

First, we must let people know up front and frequently that there is room in the body of Christ for differences over minor issues. Most churches have an approved and accepted statement of faith, so on those points there should be agreement. But even in such a statement, however, there may be a few points which are open to alternate interpretations (i.e. the timing of the rapture,

etc.). Leaders must determine which doctrinal issues are non-negotiable, and allow people the freedom to share their differences of opinion on other, lesser issues. I have long felt that the only truly non-negotiable doctrines are those that pertain to salvation. The rest are fine for discussion, but not worthy of dividing over. People need to feel confident that they can share their understandings without fear of public rebuke if they differ somewhat with leadership on minor issues.

Secondly, let people know up front how leadership will handle a situation of false teaching. I suggest the following: With the above attitude as a foundation, if someone does begin sharing a patently false teaching during a meeting, a recognized leader should approach them in a non-judgmental manner and immediately take them aside to speak privately. Another leader should then lead the people in a song, a prayer, or however the Lord may lead. The first leader should ascertain from the speaker whether they are aware of the error they were bringing. If not, the leader then can briefly share the truth and perhaps set up an appointment for further counsel. If the person truly believes the error is truth, then the leader will have to trust the Holy Spirit to give wisdom on how to proceed, whether to deal with it now or make an appointment to deal with it later. At some point before the meeting ends, I believe the leader should share the outcome with everyone else present, i.e. why the speaker was taken aside, whether they have "seen the light," whether additional counsel and prayer is needed, etc. If the speaker was merely mistaken and now understands the truth, it would be tremendously affirming to have hands laid on and prayer offered for him or her. Then allow them to finish their teaching if they so desire and the Spirit confirms.

By making a plan such as this in advance and sharing it with those who attend these meetings we can eliminate much of the fear over this potential problem.

Verse 26: *...each one...has a revelation*

The Word of God is an inexhaustible wellspring of truth, the depths of which could never be plumbed even over several lifetimes. It is the final and complete revelation of all the truth God has given us, and can neither be diminished nor amended by man. Yet while we can never add to the Bible, there is nonetheless always "new truth" for us to find, in the sense that it is new to us. The Greek word used here for revelation means "to uncover, make visible," and this is what the Holy Spirit does when He reveals truth to us which was always there in plain sight, yet for some reason hidden from our eyes and understanding. Because we only "know in part" and "see in a mirror dimly" we are in constant need of the Spirit's fresh revelation of transforming truth applied to our lives. One major source of this revelation is available through our gatherings.

Paul wrote to the Galatians that he received his knowledge of the gospel not from man, but "through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:11,12). From this and the many other examples we see in scripture, we can define revelation as any word, message, thought, idea, vision, dream, etc., that the Holy Spirit speaks or imparts to us. Without question, any and all such revelations must be submitted to the written word of God for confirmation before they can be accepted as true. Scriptural examples also show us that revelation can come any time the Lord chooses, not just during a service or prayer meeting.

The Lord describes His word as a "two-edged sword." I believe one reason He did so is because the one who wields it (by speaking it forth) must be "cut" by it as much as those to whom it is spoken. All revelation has potential for this dual application: first to our own heart and life, then (if the Lord wills) shared with our brothers and sisters. Many people mistakenly assume that any revelation they receive is supposed to be immediately shared publicly. We must teach them to allow the Spirit to apply it fully to their own heart and life, and then ask the Lord if He wants them to share it.

When the Lord does release us to share a revelation which He has brought to bear upon our heart, we will do so through one or more of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12. These gifts are the primary means through which revelation comes during a gathering, so let's examine their use in this context.

A. Prophecy.

Paul's statements about this gift in 1 Corinthians 14 leave no doubt that, in his view, prophecy is vitally important when believers gather. Prophecy can be defined as sharing a rhema from the logos, that is to say, a revelation of a specific truth out of the whole body of truth found in God's word. It is fairly well accepted that there are two basic types of prophecy--forthtelling and foretelling. In forthtelling we are offering a "new to us" understanding of God's word or a fresh emphasis on a particular truth, whereas in foretelling we are sharing about things God desires to do or is about to do.

In the context of our gatherings the purpose for prophecy is clear: it is only for edification, exhortation and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). Some have falsely believed that their prophesying must resemble that of the Old Testament prophets, filled with judgment and rebuke. While there certainly may be circumstances under which God will desire to bring such a word to a gathering, I believe this type of word should be delivered (or at least pre-confirmed) by someone who is recognized by leadership as standing in one of the five-fold ministry offices, preferably that of the Prophet (Eph. 4:11). To avoid problems in this area, people should be instructed that they may share freely any words which edify or build up, exhort or encourage, comfort or console, but if they receive a word of judgment or rebuke it must be submitted to leadership first for their review and permission to share.

Who may prophesy? In verse 31 Paul writes, "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted;" [emphasis mine]. Anyone and everyone who receives a revelation from the Holy Spirit should be welcome to share at the appropriate time (more on that later). We are further commanded to "desire earnestly to prophesy" (vs. 39), reminding us again of the importance of this gift to the life of the body. People need to be encouraged to launch out in faith and share what they believe the Holy Spirit has given them, because not to do so is disobedience to God and actually hurts the body of Christ. Paul further indicates that each one who prophesies does so "according to the proportion of his faith" (Romans 12:6), teaching us that there is a definite process of growth involved in exercising this gift. In the beginning there is often tremendous uncertainty over whether we have truly heard from the Lord, so we may exhibit an understandable hesitancy or tentativeness when we share. As we become more familiar with how the Spirit speaks to us, we learn to trust more in what we receive from Him, and can speak with more boldness and conviction. We need to encourage people not to fear this process but accept it, and work at growing in their ability to hear His voice clearly. This may require lifestyle changes for some, to clear their lives of distracting and/or unrighteous influences that can hinder or distort the word.

We also need to teach them that every revelation that they share does not have to be prefaced with "Thus saith the Lord!" Especially for those who are just learning to flow in this area, it is far more proper to say something like, "I believe the Lord is telling me that...", or, "I believe the Spirit is showing me that...." This makes room for humility and affords us a more graceful opportunity to acknowledge that we "missed it" when a mistake may occur. It is far better to limit our use of the divine imprimatur upon our words to those times when we are truly certain that we are giving, as best we can, a word-for-word message from the Lord.

Leaders need to realize that although mistakes will be made and problems may crop up from time to time, this cannot be used as an excuse to quench the Spirit. God's word commands us not to "despise prophetic utterances." (1 Thess. 5:20). I dearly love the pungent metaphor of Proverbs 14:4, "Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of the ox." The strength of each local body of Christ will increase significantly as we allow the Spirit to speak through whomever He wills, even if there are messes to clean up occasionally. To handle major problems, the same approach I suggested for dealing with false teaching may also be employed in the event of an improper or false prophecy.

Paul gives some additional practical guidelines in verses 29 and 30: "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent."

The idea here seems to be that we should allow only two or three people to share and then take a break to consider what was said before allowing any additional words. It seems to me there are at least three reasons why this is a wise practice:

1. Human memory has its limits, and if we were to allow six or ten or even more prophetic words to be shared one right after another it would be virtually impossible to remember all that was said.
2. God's word is given for us to respond to, so we must make time to determine before the Lord what response He desires us to make.
3. We need time to obey the command to "pass judgment" on what was shared.

The word for "judgment" in the Greek is *diakrino*, meaning to separate, or discriminate. Leaders bear the primary responsibility to determine what does or does not line up with the Bible, to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God." (1 John 4:1), and for determining how to respond to any inaccuracies or problems. In most cases, separating the meat from the bones will require nothing more than simply re-emphasizing verbally the major thrust of what was said and how it applies to the gathering, leaving the rest to fall to the ground hopefully forgotten. Sometimes the Lord may prompt a leader to bring a gentle correction perhaps by reading an appropriate scripture or through a clarifying statement. It should never appear that the leader is publicly rebuking or judging the person who gave the incorrect word, as this will likely intimidate those who are just beginning to exercise their faith to share in the gathering. Instead, seek out the person afterward and arrange a time where they can receive any counsel or teaching they may need. Only in instances of major error or demonic involvement is it necessary to take someone aside, as described earlier.

B. Word of Knowledge

A Word of Knowledge is a specific revelation by the Spirit of certain facts that the speaker could not have otherwise known, outside of receiving them from the Lord. An example of this would be a word which reveals that one or more people in the group is suffering from a specific sickness or infirmity. In this case, I believe "what God reveals, He heals," so healing prayer should then be offered.

Care should be taken in sharing certain kinds of details about a person's life that may be embarrassing or hurtful to others present (specific sin, for example). People should be taught that if they have any doubt about the appropriateness of sharing a particular word of this type, they should seek out a leader for confirmation.

Since this type of word of knowledge rarely involves scriptural issues, there is usually no need to judge them as we would a prophecy. If the word is incorrect, it will be obvious from the lack of response to it. People need to be instructed not to be fearful of failure or too proud to admit that they may have "missed it" in what they shared. We need to remain humble and gracious towards each other, and maintain a corporate attitude of humility, realizing that we're all in this together as we learn how to flow in the things of the Spirit.

Words of knowledge almost always require some sort of response. Leaders need to be sensitive to the Spirit's direction on how to respond to it, and ready to help encourage those to whom it applies to respond and receive ministry.

C. Discerning of spirits.

Peter warned us that our adversary, the devil, constantly prowls about seeking to capture and devour unsuspecting believers, and Paul admonishes us not to be ignorant of his schemes. It should therefore come as no surprise that Satan would attempt to infiltrate our meetings in order to influence what is shared and done there. Knowing he cannot prevent gatherings from occurring, he works to lessen or distort their power by trying to introduce deception, distraction or oppression, in an effort to lead us astray "from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Because of this, those gifted with discerning of spirits should be sought out and trained to assist leaders in overseeing meetings. Through this gift, the Holy Spirit enables a believer to "see" into the spirit realm, and know what the enemy is doing. Those so gifted are not swayed by the outward demeanor or eloquence of someone who is sharing, rather they are able to sense and expose the true source of the person's expression--whether the Holy Spirit, their human spirit, or a demonic spirit.

In addition, there are times when Satan will target one or more specific spirits against a gathering, to hinder believers from entering freely into God's presence. Spirits such as depression, discouragement, complacency, religion, etc., can have a dampening effect on the tone and flow of a meeting, though usually it is not immediately apparent why this is so until the Holy Spirit gives discernment.

There may also be times when the Lord desires to lead a gathering into spiritual warfare against territorial spirits, i.e. principalities over a city, state or country, requiring discernment of the specific spirits involved.

Once an attack and the specific spirit(s) behind it is identified, then appropriate spiritual warfare can be waged to resist and overcome it, through prayer, praise and worship, and the Word of God. If the enemy is using an individual to bring the attack, then that person must be taken aside and out of the meeting as outlined earlier.

D. Word of Wisdom.

This is one gift that is most crucial for successful gatherings. When the Lord blesses us with a revelation of His truth, we grow in knowledge and understanding. Wisdom, however, is knowing how to apply that truth to the specific situation at hand. In the context of our gatherings, those with this gift are often used to relay instructions from the Spirit on how He wants His children to respond to a word of the Lord.

For example, if a word comes forth calling for a fresh offering of ourselves as living sacrifices before the Lord, this would certainly require some kind of response from everyone. Clearly there are many different ways a word like this can be responded to, but perhaps in this case a word of wisdom then comes indicating that we are to prostrate ourselves before the Lord in repentance and re-dedication. This provides the direction needed to ensure that all who obey receive the full measure of ministry the Spirit desires to impart.

Unfortunately, there have been more times than I care to remember that a powerful word such as the above example came forth in a meeting, and the only response by everyone was applause (of all things!), followed by someone in leadership moving things on to the next item on the service schedule. People must be taught that the Lord does not favor us with revelation in order to tickle our ears, give us spiritual goose bumps, or inflate our opinion of our spirituality. His word comes forth for a purpose, and with power to accomplish that purpose (Is. 55:10,11), yet we have sadly rendered it void for ourselves by our lack of proper response to it. I believe it is safe to say that there is no word of the Lord that doesn't require some sort of response, meaning that we must make time to receive any words of wisdom concerning it, so that we are instructed what to do.

E. Tongues and Interpretation

In the context of gatherings this gift is understood as speaking publicly in an unknown or foreign language by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is distinguished from the personal, private "prayer language" of tongues most often associated with the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Lord has sovereignly chosen to speak to His people at times "through stammering lips and a foreign tongue" (vs. 21; Is. 28:11), and when such a message is then interpreted into a commonly known language it often brings needed revelation to our hearts and lives. Verse 22 declares that tongues are a "sign" for unbelievers, and indeed from the very first time in Acts 2 to the present there have been many testimonies of unsaved people hearing the gospel proclaimed in their native language as a message in tongues is spoken.

Some who read Paul's comparison of tongues and prophecy in the first half of chapter 14 conclude that it (tongues) is not as important or effective as other gifts, thus erring as much to the opposite degree as the Corinthians who exalted it beyond proper measure. The Bible is clear that we must not "forbid to speak in tongues" (vs.39). We have no right to allow our personal preference or opinion concerning this gift to deny the Lord a means of communicating with His children.

Instructions concerning the use of this gift are also clear: If no interpreter is present, no one should speak a public message in tongues (vs. 28). Those to whom God has given this gift are to pray for the gift of interpretation (vs. 13). In those instances where a message is given and there seems to be no interpretation forthcoming, leaders should encourage everyone to be sensitive to the Spirit and to step out and share what they believe the Lord is giving them as an interpretation. If that fails to elicit a response, I believe the Lord will give a leader an interpretation to share, so that proper order can be maintained. Once this situation has arisen in a meeting, however, leadership should then request that no further messages in tongues be given, because of the lack of an interpreter.

We are also instructed to limit the number of tongues messages to "two or at most three...and let one interpret" (vs. 27). As with prophecy, a word of the Lord given through an interpretation must be properly understood and responded to. But whether this limitation refers to two or three at one time or over the entire meeting is not entirely clear from this passage.

The command to let "one" interpret can be understood to require either the designation of one particular person to act as interpreter for the meeting, or that only one interpretation should be given for a message or group of messages. Based on my experience, I lean towards the latter. I have been in meetings where conflicting "interpretations" have been spoken for one or more tongues messages, leading to confusion and uncertainty among many. To avoid this, people should be instructed to avoid giving an interpretation immediately after someone has just given one. Instead, encourage them to wait on the Lord to see if perhaps what they've received might better be considered a prophetic word or other revelation.

Chapter 5 - Liberty and Order

Let all things be done for edification. (vs.26)

But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner. (vs.40)

One of the central issues pertaining to God's people under the New Covenant is our freedom in Christ. Freedom from sin, death, Satan's dominion; freedom to love, serve and minister to both the Lord and our fellow man. So it is not at all surprising that this truth is applied here to our gatherings. "Let all things be done" is a command (stated twice for emphasis) that is absolutely foundational if we are to experience everything that the Lord desires for our meetings.

Because most leaders take their God-given responsibility of oversight in the Body seriously, there is a natural tendency to want to control what happens in a service, so as to "protect the flock" from false teaching, harmful ministry, etc. This tendency must be acknowledged, and corrected when necessary, if we want to see true Holy Spirit liberty manifested in our midst. In my experience, the objective reality for most gatherings today is that leaders place far more emphasis on the "properly and in an orderly manner" portion than the "let all things be done" half of the verse. We cannot escape the fact that "...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. 3:17) This means that if we want our meetings to receive all that the Lord has for us through the ministry of His Spirit, we must allow Him to move as He desires. When He moves, God's people are set free, and they will express that anointing verbally or physically as He leads. As leaders we must be willing to put aside our pre-conceived ideas and agendas so that the Lord can take the meeting in any direction He desires. I will have more to say on this in the next section.

One of the primary functions of leadership in this area is to maintain the boundaries of liberty, as prescribed by scripture. Absolute freedom (or license) is clearly unscriptural and would create chaos in a meeting, so the Lord has given us three qualifications or criteria upon which everything done must be based:

1. Does it edify (build up)?
2. Is it done properly (well)?
3. Is it in order (timing)?

Does it Edify?

"Let all things be done for edification." (vs.26)

Most of us understand that "edify" means to build up, strengthen, and encourage our fellow believers, and that this activity is of vital importance to the growth of the Body. Yet at the same time there is often some level of uncertainty over whether something we want to share will actually be edifying or not.

In Ephesians 4:29 Paul writes: "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." I believe this verse provides an excellent standard against which every utterance and action in a meeting may be weighed to determine its edification value.

"Unwholesome" here can also be translated "rotten" or "useless." This brings to mind Romans 8:6, "For the mind set on the flesh is death..." and Galatians 6:8, "For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption..." Doing something "in the flesh" simply means it

has a solely human impetus or motivation, as opposed to being inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore when something is said or done "in the flesh" at a gathering there is no sense of life or grace being imparted. Rather we find merely an empty and often sad display of self-aggrandizement, or an attempt to insinuate some other human agenda into the proceedings. And since, in and of ourselves, we have nothing of any spiritual value to offer, all such fleshly activities are by nature "unwholesome," "rotten," and "useless." It is the responsibility of leadership to discern whether a questionable contribution to a meeting is a fleshly display or perhaps just someone struggling to learn how to let the Lord use them, and to determine the proper response in each situation. In most cases, simply scheduling a private counseling session will offer the best opportunity to provide whatever correction or encouragement that may be necessary.

If the atmosphere of a meeting becomes negatively affected by someone "fleshing out," a leader should move quickly to bring the focus back to the Lord, either through a song or a prayer, or some other means, as the Spirit may direct.

To minimize this potential problem we need to train people how to recognize the difference between flesh and Spirit in themselves. In Revelation 19:10b we read, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," which clearly speaks to what should be the motivation and focus of all that is said and done. Asking ourselves questions such as the following may be helpful in identifying areas needing correction:

Why do I want to share this: so that others will look favorably on me? So that I will feel better about myself? Or because I must obey what I sense the Spirit telling me to do?

Is what I am about to say or do going to glorify and point others to Jesus, or to me?

There are many believers (myself included) who do not fear but rather enjoy moving in their gifts and want very much to be involved in meetings such as we are describing. These especially need to regularly question their true motives to be sure they are not doing things in order to be seen by men or for ego gratification.

The phrase "that it may give grace to those who hear" in Eph. 4:29 is a truly wonderful description of the concept of edification. Years ago Bill Gothard, in his original Institute in Basic Youth Conflicts, offered an "expanded definition" of grace using Philippians 2:12,13. In these verses we are exhorted to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." In other words, grace may be understood as the presence and power of God, freely imparted to us, which gives us both the desire and the ability to do His will. Apart from His work in us, we would not even want to obey Him, much less be able to.

Using this "expanded definition" of grace we can now ask these additional questions of ourselves:

Is what I feel led to say or do going to encourage people and increase their desire to obey God?

Can He use me through this to impart fresh anointing that will empower people to do His will?

If we believe that the answer to these questions is "yes," then we can be confident that our part in the meeting will in fact be edifying.

Is it Done Properly?

"But let all things be done properly..." (vs. 40).

The Greek word for "properly" here, *euschemonos*, is an interesting one. Used rather sparingly in the New Testament, in its adjectival form Strong defines it as "bearing one's self becomingly in speech or behavior." It also can refer to the beauty and gracefulness of form that might be seen in a gymnast or a dancer. The idea seems to be that whatever is said or done in a meeting ought to be done well in terms of how it is presented to those assembled. Just as a gymnast would want to perform their routine to the best of their abilities, so should we desire to give forth what we receive from the Spirit to the best of our abilities. This means that words should be spoken clearly, songs sung with confidence, actions taken boldly, etc. Paul's earlier instructions to the Corinthians (14:7,8) contrast the need for musical instruments to be played well and clearly if they are to be appreciated, with our need to present the spoken word of the Lord in a clear and understandable fashion.

It is crucial that we each understand and acknowledge this truth concerning our individual participation in a gathering: When the Lord gives us something to share we are, in a very real sense, representing Him in what we say or do (cf. 1 Peter 4:11). It would therefore be very helpful to ask, "Jesus, how would You share this?" and then do likewise. I'm not talking about play-acting here--this is a matter of faith. If we believe we have truly heard from the Lord then we need to step out and boldly do what He's told us to do, to the best of our abilities.

Some may object, "But if we are doing it to the best of our abilities, aren't we doing it in the flesh?" The answer is no--because "flesh" refers to where the idea or motivation to do something comes from. If it comes from us, that's flesh. When the Lord tells us to do something, that's not our flesh. But at the same time we need to recognize that our first step of obedience to Him has to be "in the flesh" because that's what we all live in! Look at every example of men and women of faith in the Scriptures and you'll see that they all began obeying the Lord by making a decision to just step out and do it to the best of their abilities. Then God came in and did through them what they could never have done with only those human abilities. God takes our limited abilities and uses them for His purposes and glory, but if we do not give Him our all we limit our usefulness to Him.

Paul also wrote "...whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31b). We diminish the glory He receives when we do not strive to present well whatever He has given us. While it is certainly true that we all have limitations and varying degrees of ability, we can nonetheless choose to do our best with what we've got. My sense of what the Lord is saying here is this: Someone with great ability who does a half-hearted job at sharing something from the Lord will not be as effective as someone with lesser natural ability who gives their all in presenting what He's given them. Or to put it another way, an operatic tenor who whispers and mumbles a "song of the Lord" is nowhere near as effective as someone sings out clearly despite the occasional flat note!

All who wish to participate in meetings like this need to be strongly encouraged to make a personal commitment to excellence that will help them do their best in sharing or doing what the Lord has given them.

Is It in Order?

"But let all things be done...in an orderly manner." (vs.40)

The Greek phrase here, kata taxis, is literally "according to a right and orderly arrangement." The root verb of taxis is tasso, which means "to place in a certain order, to appoint, to ordain."

The order being described here is the sort that, on a secular level, those of us who spend endless hours in committee or business meetings are all too familiar with. When a Board of Directors or other such committee convenes a meeting, there is usually one designated person responsible for seeing that the meeting agenda is followed and completed. This person determines when there's been enough discussion on a particular point, whether to vote on it or table it, and when to move on to the next agenda item. All this is done, obviously, to maintain order and to ensure that the goals for that meeting are fulfilled.

As we consider how this concept should apply to our gatherings unto the Lord, the first question that must be settled is, Who sets and directs the agenda? For several reasons, I strongly believe that this is solely the Lord's prerogative. Under the Old Covenant, He gave specific instructions concerning when and how His people were to come together for worship. Everything from the placement of the Temple furniture, to the priest's garb, to the kinds of sacrifices that were acceptable, to the timing and frequency of the required assemblies--all was carefully prescribed in order that the Lord might be worshipped as He desired. Under the New Covenant, some of the forms may have changed but the requirement to gather unto Him did not. Before His ascension, Jesus commanded the disciples to remain together in Jerusalem, so they were "continually devoting themselves to prayer" in the upper room (Acts 1:14). After Pentecost they recognized that this practice must extend to include the 3,000 new believers, so they all continued to meet together daily, either in the Temple or house to house. As we have already noted, the passage we're studying here along with others such as John 4:23, Hebrews 10:19-25 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, clearly indicate that the Lord expects His people to come together to meet with Him on a regular basis.

Because the blood sacrifices of the Old Covenant did not remove sins, only covered them over (Heb. 10:1-22), we understand that believers then did not experience the Holy Spirit abiding in their lives. This necessitated the detailed instructions given to them for their gatherings. Under the New Covenant, because each believer is personally indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and can hear and know His voice (John 10:4,27), He does not have to codify His agenda for our gatherings in advance. He can speak directly to our hearts as we gather unto Him. Which is precisely the point: Since He clearly had a specific agenda for each Old Covenant gathering, isn't it altogether reasonable to assume He must have a specific agenda for each of our meetings as well? After all, He truly is our "Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." (Jas. 1:17b).

Consider this analogy: If we were requested to meet with the President or some other foreign head of state, would we sit down with them and insist that everyone follow our agenda for such an event? Not likely. Yet week after week we do this very thing to our Lord. We pray, "Lord, let Your will be done in this service," and then proceed to blithely follow our own agenda and schedule. On those rare occasions when the Lord does manage to break into our program to do His will, it is treated as some special event instead of the norm. Even worse, these divine encounters are viewed by some as "interruptions" which must be controlled so as not to throw the service off schedule.

In our desire to make our services successful, we have substituted our own techniques, goals, and agendas for being led by the Lord. Too many of us approach gatherings as if they were our idea, almost as if we are doing Him a favor by making time to meet with Him. Because of this we feel entirely justified in exercising complete control over the agenda. Yet how can this be so when

we realize that it is, in fact, the Lord, the Almighty, the Creator of the universe, who commands us to meet with Him? Shouldn't we be following His agenda? What right do we have to force Him to follow our plans?

Some may object, "I pray and seek the Lord to discern His will for our services, and plan accordingly." I'm sure we all try to do this. But even though we believe that what we are planning is of the Lord, we must never forget that we only "see in a mirror dimly," we only "know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). How can we presume to think that we have received revelation on all that the Lord desires to do? Look again at everything that can potentially happen in a Spirit-led meeting. There is simply no way any one person can know in advance all that He wants to do. Instead, as we simply spend time in His presence, waiting on Him, He will not only make His agenda known but will carry it out in our midst, using many of those who have assembled together.

Humanly speaking, most of us in leadership would freely admit that we're much more comfortable knowing what to expect and what will happen, so it is not at all surprising that this tendency would become predominant over time. Meetings became regimented and regulated to avoid our fear of the unknown. Some even attempt to spiritualize and justify their control by claiming their God-given role of oversight. Yet, as Peter pointed out, true Biblical oversight is never controlling. We are rather to "shepherd the flock" through our example of servant/leadership (1 Pet. 5:1-3). A literal shepherd oversees and protects his flock by establishing boundaries for them.

Within those boundaries the sheep are safe; outside they are not, and he can quickly see those who have strayed and take action to bring them back. But note well one very important point: Within those boundaries the shepherd exercises no control over the activities of the sheep. They are completely free to eat, sleep, run around, and generally do whatever it is sheep do to pass the time. In like manner Scripture provides well-defined boundaries for spiritual shepherds to establish--all the instruction we have reviewed thus far concerning our meetings being a prime example. And likewise within those boundaries a shepherd ought to give the sheep complete freedom to follow the leadings of the Spirit. Thus it is clear that leaders are to oversee the flock by teaching them where the boundaries are and by taking action if anyone engages in activity which violates those boundaries, not by imposing their own agenda, or controlling the agenda of a meeting.

Adding to our difficulties with this principle is the fact that people expect their leaders to always know what to do. And indeed, the nature of leadership is to lead, so it is entirely natural that people would look to those whom God has raised up for direction. Furthermore, we leaders usually share that expectation of ourselves, believing that we should know what to do at all times. It is crucial, however, that we understand and communicate to everyone that this is simply not true. There will be times when we will have no clue at all what the Lord is up to, and we, like them, must patiently wait on Him for direction.

As leaders, we must acknowledge that God has His own agenda for every gathering of His children. There is a plan and purpose that He desires to accomplish, and He knows how He will do so, with our cooperation. This means that if we allow the Holy Spirit to orchestrate our meetings, He will bring a divine order or flow to them. In terms of specifics (such as when we will praise, when we will worship, when we will hear revelation, etc.) the order may change from meeting to meeting. His desire is to arrange these elements so they best accomplish His purposes, and to direct the timing so we can move together from one to another in a graceful way.

The most difficult aspect of this is sensing when the Lord wants a transition to something new in the meeting. If, for example, He has lead the gathering into a season of high praise, most of us would recognize the inappropriateness of calling an abrupt halt to deliver a word concerning repentance. Yet the Spirit may truly be indicating to someone that this is where He wants to go at some point during that meeting. Since we've already submitted to His agenda, we can be sure He knows the proper timing and order for every part. The key is to continue waiting on Him. Many times something will be done, said, or sung that bears witness with what Spirit's shown us, and we can accept that as a signal to proceed in the new direction. Other times we may simply sense Him saying, "Now," and have to step out in faith. In those instances, it is important that we wait until there is something of an ebb in the current emphasis, so as not to be too disruptive. Also, people should be encouraged to seek out a leader if they are uncertain about the timing of something they want to share. If it bears witness, the Lord may want the leader to gently move the focus at the appropriate time, thus giving that person freedom to share what they have received.

As in every other aspect of this adventure, mistakes will undoubtedly be made. But since we're all in this together, and we're all learning together, let's not be too hard on ourselves or each other. If something is presented "out of order" and disrupts the flow of a meeting, let's never forget why we're gathering in the first place: to spend time with Father. No matter what happens, that is something we can always do. We can always re-focus our hearts on Him through worship, prayer, or the Word. Or even, as Kathie Walters humorously shares in her article (see Addendum A), on that rare occasion when everything just seems to fall apart, we can simply say, "let's go and get some coffee." As she points out, sometimes we need to learn to laugh at ourselves and not take ourselves too seriously all the time. The joy of walking and working together with Jesus ought to permeate all that we do, along with an abundance of grace and love towards each other.

A Major Hindrance

One of the biggest hindrances we face in fully implementing this pattern is our busy schedule and sense of time. Here in America especially, many believers have become conditioned to meetings of a certain length, and leaders often feel tremendous pressure to keep things within those expected limits. This is a mindset which must be challenged by leadership through teaching and exhortation. Have you noticed that one item conspicuously absent from our text is any mention of how long meetings should be? I find this rather curious in light of all the other practical instruction Paul gives. Could it be that the Lord never intended for us to decide the length of our meetings with Him?

If we truly believe that God has a will, a plan, an agenda for each meeting, how can we presume to shove Him and His desires aside, as it were, because of our petty concerns over time and schedule? Do we value the glory of His presence so little? We have thus usurped the right to decide how long our heavenly Father can spend time with His assembled children. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so--we need to repent. We must begin to allow the Holy Spirit to not only orchestrate the content our meetings, but also to direct the length of them as well.

The Lord is perfectly aware of our human limitations. I believe He will either supernaturally sustain us (so as to overcome our limitations) or end a meeting because of those limitations, as He chooses. As to knowing when the Lord is releasing us from a meeting, I have found that there is often a sense of completeness or fullness that comes. It is wise to confirm with at least one other leader that it's time to close.

From a practical standpoint, people should be instructed that if they know they have to leave a meeting at a certain time (that is, before the meeting is likely to be over), they should find a seat at the back of the room or near the exit and slip out quietly.

The Future

The re-emergence of the Biblical pattern will likely occur first in small groups and other less formal settings. This trend will then catalyze change within our larger Sunday gatherings as well. I believe there will arise a greater desire within the body for a less "produced" and more spontaneous church service, in effect a larger scale version of what will be happening in the homes. As evangelism becomes more fully centered within the life of the home groups and less a function of the Sunday service, this will lead to the restoration of a more informal, more celebratory service format that may include sharing meals together, as in the beginning. One exception to this will be found in those churches that provide special "seeker-friendly" services. This type of outreach will probably always require a more traditional presentation style format. But for believers' meetings, I believe that in a few years the polished presentations most of us experience every Sunday will no longer be our only choice, at least in those churches whose leadership chooses to embrace and implement the Spirit-led pattern outlined in 1 Corinthians 14.

The Final Word?

Not by a long shot. Since most of us (myself included) are just beginning to learn how to follow the Lord in these things, there will undoubtedly be much fresh revelation forthcoming that will increase our understanding and experience. I consider what I've presented here as nothing more than a rough, first draft, an outline if you will, that will hopefully be amended and expanded through the testimony of many others. I would love to hear from anyone who desires to share and dialog. You can reach me via email at: russ@etrdestiny.com.

Addendum 1

WHEN THE CHURCH WENT OFF TRACK MANY YEARS AGO...

by Kathie Walters

Around 300 A.D. the Holy Spirit's influence upon the church began to wane. Leaders began to rely on their own abilities, rather than the Holy Spirit. The church then made one of the worst mistakes in history. She gave up basic freedoms that powered the early church's success, and put a strangle hold on much of the church's powerful ministry. How? By turning the saints from lively participators into pew potatoes, or spectators.

Whatever happened to, "When you come together brethren, everyone of you hath a psalm, a hymn, a tongue, an interpretation, a revelation etc." (1.Cor.14:26). How did this early dynamic church meeting turn into a one (or sometimes two) man show with an almost professional sounding worship team? What was the secret of the early church? Well for starters they didn't have to worry about financing buildings, their money was invested in living stones. (Of course a roof over our heads to keep the rain out while gathering is a necessary asset.) They met in houses and rented rooms, an informal often boisterous affair with full-scale meals. Church was a kind of floating party with every one participating 100%. At the weekly get-togethers everyone was the star of the show. Everyone was needed.

As the church grew in various cities, it ceased to become a "family" and turned into a kind of "establishment." The final nail in the church coffin was the fact that Emperor Constantine kindly issued the Edict of Milan, officially ending the persecutions and tolerating the church. Then came "US" and "THEM:" priest and laity. The problem was that 98% of the church was "them" and so the professionals took over. The rest learned to sit and be quiet and join in singing when told to. They learned to add something to the meeting-- afterwards--at home or in the foyer, but not in the meeting.

Whereas before, everyone could contribute to the meeting as the Holy Spirit moved upon them, now the Holy Spirit was only allowed to move in the pulpit. At first everyone could get into the act: prophecies, healings, tongues and interpretations. Revelations, spiritual songs, words of knowledge flowed through "whosoever." Now, maybe the service is open for the "Body" to share and minister for about 10 minutes--if you're lucky.

Many Pastors cannot handle a meeting where they don't know what is going to happen, or who is going to do what. But we are supposed to be a family, are we not? So what if someone makes a mistake! No one will lose their salvation. The saints are to be taught to hear from God and let the Holy Spirit flow through them as He wants to. What better place to learn than in church. The youngest convert will learn to discern what God is saying to the church in that particular meeting. It may not be the place to share, "a funny thing happened to me on the way to the meeting."

Where did our present form come from? Probably from the church down the road, because they got their's from the church round the corner, and so we all ended up with the hymn sandwich (to use a phrase from England). Three hymns, a prayer for the nation, an offering, maybe another hymn, a wonderful message and short benediction and then we get to go home. Sharing to be done OUTSIDE. In actual fact if you look at it, our present form comes from the Old Testament pattern. The priest went in to the Holy of Holies on behalf of the people. It was the priest who had the ear of God, plus of course God's special leaders like Moses, David, Joshua etc.

Many Christians seem to have simply transferred these roles to the pastor or minister, especially for the church services. After all, he gets paid to seek the Lord and come and deliver the message to the people, just like Moses going up the mountain. Most people see the worship team as people who lead them into the presence of God.

While music and songs can bring the anointing into a meeting, it is totally an Old Testament revelation. In Hebrews we are taught that the old pattern was **DONE AWAY** and now it is a **NEW AND LIVING WAY**. **JESUS**, our High Priest once and for all rent the veil and made the way open for **EVERY BELIEVER TO STAND AND WALK CONTINUALLY IN THE SPIRIT AND IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD**. We don't rely on someone else to bring us into the presence of God any more. We bring the presence of the Lord with us. The Ark of the Covenant is replaced by the living stones. The glory, or presence of God, is or should be **IN EACH ONE OF US**.

Many Charismatics were filled with the Spirit twenty years ago and got some life, and for a while it looked like the old rusty boat was going to really rock as people wanted to **GIVE** and not just listen to someone else. But somehow it soon all got put back in a box. Only this time we sang choruses instead of hymns, dressed more casually, were more friendly toward each other, gave a little more liberally financially, had a more uplifting message. But guess what? It's still the same form. Largely and with a few exceptions, it's still **"US"** and **"THEM,"** the professionals and laity. The poor Pastor got worn out trying to do everything and the people just expected him to do almost anything. After all, he was **PAID** to do everything.

In the book of Revelation 2:6, we are told about the works of the Nicolaitans which Jesus hated. Well, Nico means power and laity means people. Translated: Power over the People. Somehow the part of the shepherds; i.e. pastors and elders, got switched from being ministry gifts that had authority in the Spirit to take authority over that which came against the sheep, to being people who began to take authority over the sheep. They began to tell people what God was saying instead of allowing the sheep to hear from the Great Shepherd for themselves, as they were meant to. The Lord Jesus Christ is jealous over His relationship with His sheep.

The Holy Spirit showed me something one time when I was praying with some people in a city in Virginia. I had a vision of a beautiful banqueting table. It was laid with all kinds of dishes of food and very fine wine. There were seats all around the table for the people to come and eat. In front of the table was a man. He had his back to the table and he was facing a crowd of other people who were in front of him. Although the table was laid and there was an invitation to **"COME AND EAT"** to **EVERYONE WHO WAS HUNGRY**, the man in front was reaching to the table and then giving the people some of the food from the table. He was deciding what they could have or not have according to his own tastes. But you see it was not his decision to make, it was the Lord's table. Some of the people side-stepped him and went to the table anyway, some couldn't even really see it, because he was standing in front of it. Some just accepted whatever he gave, because they assumed he must know.

Then the picture changed and the Holy Spirit showed me what the man in front was supposed to do. The man turned so that he faced the table, in the same direction as the people. Then he led the people **TO THE TABLE**, and **THEY ALL SAT DOWN AND BEGAN TO FELLOWSHIP (SHARE) and EAT**.

To oversee the flock like a shepherd is to guard them from the enemy, not guard them from getting too much of the Holy Spirit. Our place as pastors, teachers and leaders is to preach the whole counsel of God. I know we can't do that in three weeks. That includes Salvation, deliverance, healing, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the gifts and the fruits of the Spirit, all of

them. It also includes making available ministry gifts so that the people can eat and receive revelation and impartation from outside ministries: Prophets, Apostles, Healing Evangelists etc. We do not have the right to withhold God's table from His people.

I recently went to Northside Church in Alpharetta. I went every night for eight days because they had two Apostles from S. Africa ministering. These men had raised the dead quite a few times. They had something to IMPART. I did receive something wonderful from the Lord. The glory of God fell on me in a powerful way and IT STAYED. The following Saturday that presence came so strong that I stayed in this glory praying for 7 1/2 hours, and I didn't know it until it began to lift a little. That powerful presence has just stayed on me, it is wonderful.

Personally, I need all the sheep from the littlest to the greatest. God teaches me and brings me the word of the Lord through kids sometimes as well great prophets and leaders. You can't dictate to Him who He can use in your life. The O.T. priest Eli had to humble himself when God gave him a very strong Word through a novice, young Samuel.

We were involved in a great revival in England some 25 years ago. Prior to that we had sat under a religious form, and although we had great preaching, none of us ever got to share anything ourselves. We were never told that we were supposed to contribute, so we just sat and listened to the wonderful sermons. When we experienced revival we let God do what He wanted. He used everyone: small kids, big kids, parents, lawyers, doctors, truck drivers, housewives, laborers, in fact anyone who was willing to be used. The meetings would be in full swing before any leaders or musicians were there. We did not wait for an official opening of service. We were already in high praise and you were hit with a bolt of electricity when you opened the door. In fact many times we had to step over bodies outside the meeting place, the power of God was present on the people. No one ever knew what was going to happen, or who was going to do what. We didn't know when it would end. There was no "front" as the seats were in a U shape. The musicians sat among the people and led or followed according to what the Holy Spirit was doing. In one meeting a young lad of ten stood up and sang (off key) two lines of "I will bless the Lord at all times," and God's Spirit came in and swept over 200 people off their seats flat onto the floor.

We had special teaching meetings so that we were not a bunch of idiots as far as learning doctrine was concerned. God raised up Elders and Pastors and Full time ministries, but they equipped the Body. Sometimes the pastors preached, sometimes they didn't. Sometimes God used Joe, or Kate, or Harry or Sue. One thing is certain though, Jesus showed up. He seemed to love being in the middle of all the excitement, because He could do whatever he wanted.

There were times of course, when we missed God. Somebody would get up and be out of it and not minister life. When you don't have professional and gifted preachers doing it all, Brother Bill's little message can be very boring if he misses God. A gifted preacher can hide his mistake (being out of the spirit) to the undiscerning, and get away with it. We soon learned how to correct and encourage. We taught them that if at first you don't succeed you don't quit, but try, try again. There was a lot of love flowing, nobody cared too much, we all learned together. Sometimes when we really missed it, someone would stand up and say, "Let's go and get some coffee." We learned to laugh at ourselves. When we take ourselves too seriously the religious spirit has a ball. He brings in heaviness, condemnation etc. Those saints began to hear from God in an awesome way. Through the ministry of the Body hidden things were revealed and people's hearts were made manifest, and as the Bible says, others fell down and said, "Truly, God is in this place."

In the book, *Another Wave of Revival* author Frank Bartleman, (Whitaker House publishers. ISBN 0-88368-111-0.) writing about the 1904 Azusa street revival says, "The service I am writing about began in an impromptu and spontaneous way some time before the pastor arrived. A handful of people had gathered early, which seemed to be sufficient for the Spirit's operation. The meeting started. Their expectation was from God. God was there, the people were there, and, by the time the pastor arrived, the meeting was in full swing. Pastor Smale dropped into his place, but no one seemed to pay any attention to him. Their minds were on God. No one seemed to get in another's way, although the congregation represented many religious bodies. All seemed to be in perfect harmony. The Spirit was leading. The pastor arose, read a portion of the scripture, made a few well-chosen remarks full of hope and inspiration for the occasion, and the meeting passed again from his hands. The people took it up and went on as before. Testimony, prayer, and praise were intermingled throughout the service. The meeting seemed to run itself as far as human guidance was concerned." (Page 21-22.)

"Many have declared that we cannot have open meetings today, But if that is true, then we must shut God out also. What we need is more of God to control the meetings. He must be left free to come forth at all costs." (Page 90.)

Someone wrote this about Evan Roberts, used in the 1901 Welsh Revival: "It was not the eloquence of Evan Roberts that broke men down, but his tears. He would break down, crying bitterly for God to bend them, in agony of prayer, the tears coursing down his cheeks, his whole frame writhing. Strong men would break down and cry like children. Women would shriek. A sound of weeping and wailing would fill the air. Evan Roberts, in the intensity of his agony, would fall in the pulpit, while many in the crowd often fainted."

With the coming revival there is coming great change. We need to be like the willow trees that bend. Trees that are dry break easily.

Addendum 2

Fifteen Theses towards a Re-Incarnation of Church

God is changing the Church, and that, in turn, will change the world. Millions of Christians around the world are aware of an imminent reformation of global proportions. They say, in effect: "Church as we know it is preventing Church as God wants it." A growing number of them are surprisingly hearing God say the very same things. There is a collective new awareness of age-old revelations, a corporate spiritual echo. In the following "15 Theses" I will summarize a part of this, and I am convinced that it reflects a part of what the Spirit of God is saying to the Church today. For some, it might be the proverbial fist-sized cloud on Elijah's sky. Others already feel the pouring rain.

Fifteen Theses towards a Re-Incarnation of Church

1. Church is a Way of Life, not a series of religious meetings.

Before they were called Christians, followers of Christ have been called "The Way". One of the reasons was, that they have literally found "the way to live." The nature of Church is not reflected in a constant series of religious meetings led by professional clergy in holy rooms specially reserved to experience Jesus, but in the prophetic way followers of Christ live their everyday life in spiritually extended families as a vivid answer to the questions society faces, at the place where it counts most: in their homes.

2. Time to change the system

In aligning itself to the religious patterns of the day, the historic Orthodox Church after Constantine in the 4th century AD adopted a religious system which was in essence Old Testament, complete with priests, altar, a Christian temple (cathedral), frankincense and a Jewish, synagogue-style worship pattern. The Roman Catholic Church went on to canonize the system. Luther did reform the content of the gospel, but left the outer forms of "church" remarkably untouched; the Free-Churches freed the system from the State, the Baptists then baptized it, the Quakers dry-cleaned it, the Salvation Army put it into a uniform, the Pentecostals anointed it and the Charismatics renewed it, but until today nobody has really changed the superstructure. It is about time to do just that.

3. The Third Reformation.

In rediscovering the gospel of salvation by faith and grace alone, Luther started to reform the Church through a reformation of theology. In the 18th century through movements like the Moravians there was a recovery of a new intimacy with God, which led to a reformation of spirituality, the Second Reformation. Now God is touching the wineskins themselves, initiating a Third Reformation, a reformation of structure.

4. From Church-Houses to house-churches

Since New Testament times, there is no such thing as "a house of God". At the cost of his life, Stephen reminded unequivocally: God does not live in temples made by human hands. The Church is the people of God. The Church, therefore, was and is at home where people are at home: in ordinary houses. There, the people of God:

- share their lives in the power of the Holy Spirit,
- have "meatings," that is, they eat when they meet;
- they often do not even hesitate to sell private property and share material and spiritual blessings,

- teach each other in real-life situations how to obey God's word (dialogue-and not professor-style),
- pray and prophesy with each other, baptize, 'lose their face' and their ego by confessing their sins, regaining a new corporate identity by experiencing love, acceptance and forgiveness.

5. The church has to become small in order to grow big

Most churches of today are simply too big to provide real fellowship. They have too often become "fellowships without fellowship. The New Testament Church was a mass of small groups, typically between 10 and 15 people. It grew not upward into big congregations between 20 and 300 people filling a cathedral and making real, mutual communication improbable. Instead, it multiplied "sideways" like organic cells once these groups reached around 15-20 people. Then, if possible, it drew all the Christians together into citywide celebrations, as with Solomon's Temple court in Jerusalem. The traditional congregational church as we know it is, statistically speaking, neither big nor beautiful, but rather a sad compromise, an overgrown house-church and an under-grown celebration, often missing the dynamics of both.

6. No church is led by a Pastor alone

The local church is not led by a Pastor, but fathered by an Elder, a local person of wisdom and reality. The local house-churches are then networked into a movement by the combination of elders and members of the so-called five-fold ministries (Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Evangelists and Teachers) circulating "from house to house," whereby there is a special foundational role to play for the apostolic and prophetic ministries (Eph. 2:20, and 4:11,12). A Pastor (shepherd) is a very necessary part of the whole team, but he cannot fulfill more than a part of the whole task of "equipping the saints for the ministry," and has to be complemented synergistically by the other four ministries in order to function properly.

7. The right pieces - fitted together in the wrong way

In doing a puzzle, we need to have the right original for the pieces, otherwise the final product, the whole picture, turns out wrong, and the individual pieces do not make much sense. This has happened to large parts of the Christian world: we have all the right pieces, but have fitted them together wrong, because of fear, tradition, religious jealousy and a power-and-control mentality. As water is found in three forms (ice, water and steam) the five ministries mentioned in Eph. 4:11-12, the Apostles, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers and Evangelists are also found today, but not always in the right forms and in the right places: they are often frozen to ice in the rigid system of institutionalized Christianity; they sometimes exist as clear water; or they have vanished like steam into the thin air of free-flying ministries and "independent" churches, accountable to no-one. As it is best to water flowers with the fluid version of water, these five equipping ministries will have to be transformed back into new (and at the same time age-old) forms, so that the whole spiritual organism can flourish and the individual "ministers" can find their proper role and place in the whole. That is one more reason why we need to return back to the Maker's original and blueprint for the Church.

8. God does not leave the Church in the hands of bureaucratic clergy

No expression of a New Testament church is ever led by just one professional "holy man" doing the business of communicating with God and then feeding some relatively passive religious consumers Moses-style. Christianity has adopted this method from pagan religions, or at best from the Old Testament. The heavy professionalisation of the church since Constantine has now been a pervasive influence long enough, dividing the people of God artificially into laity and clergy. According to the New Testament (1 Tim. 2:5), "there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." God simply does not bless religious professionals to force themselves in-between people and God forever. The veil is torn, and God is allowing people to access Himself directly through Jesus Christ, the only Way. To enable the priesthood

of all believers, the present system will have to change completely. Bureaucracy is the most dubious of all administrative systems, because it basically asks only two questions: yes or no. There is no room for spontaneity and humanity, no room for real life. This may be OK for politics and companies, but not the Church. God seems to be in the business of delivering His Church from a Babylonian captivity of religious bureaucrats and controlling spirits into the public domain, the hands of ordinary people made extraordinary by God, who, like in the old days, may still smell of fish, perfume and revolution.

9. Return from organized to organic forms of Christianity

The "Body of Christ" is a vivid description of an organic, not an organized, being. Church consists on its local level of a multitude of spiritual families, which are organically related to each other as a network, where the way the pieces are functioning together is an integral part of the message of the whole. What has become a maximum of organization with a minimum of organism, has to be changed into a minimum of organization to allow a maximum of organism. Too much organization has, like a straightjacket, often choked the organism for fear that something might go wrong. Fear is the opposite of faith, and not exactly a Christian virtue. Fear wants to control, faith can trust. Control, therefore, may be good, but trust is better. The Body of Christ is entrusted by God into the hands of steward-minded people with a supernatural charismatic gift to believe God that He is still in control, even if they are not. A development of trust-related regional and national networks, not a new arrangement of political ecumenism is necessary for organic forms of Christianity to re-emerge.

10. From worshipping our worship to worshipping God

The image of much of contemporary Christianity can be summarized, a bit euphemistically, as holy people coming regularly to a holy place at a holy day at a holy hour to participate in a holy ritual lead by a holy man dressed in holy clothes against a holy fee. Since this regular performance-oriented enterprise called "worship service" requires a lot of organizational talent and administrative bureaucracy to keep going, formalized and institutionalized patterns developed quickly into rigid traditions. Statistically, a traditional 1-2 hour "worship service" is very resource-hungry but actually produces very little fruit in terms of discipling people, that is, in changed lives. Economically speaking, it might be a "high input and low output" structure. Traditionally, the desire to "worship in the right way" has led to much denominationalism, confessionalism and nominalism. This not only ignores that Christians are called to "worship in truth and in spirit," not in cathedrals holding songbooks, but also ignores that most of life is informal, and so is Christianity as "the Way of Life." Do we need to change from being powerful actors to start "acting powerfully?"

11. Stop bringing people to church, and start bringing the church to the people

The church is changing back from being a Come-structure to being again a Go-structure. As one result, the Church needs to stop trying to bring people "into the church," and start bringing the Church to the people. The mission of the Church will never be accomplished just by adding to the existing structure; it will take nothing less than a mushrooming of the church through spontaneous multiplication of itself into areas of the population of the world, where Christ is not yet known.

12. Rediscovering the "Lord's Supper" to be a real supper with real food

Church tradition has managed to "celebrate the Lord's Supper" in a homeopathic and deeply religious form, characteristically with a few drops of wine, a tasteless cookie and a sad face. However, the "Lord's Supper" was actually more a substantial supper with a symbolic meaning, than a symbolic supper with a substantial meaning. God is restoring eating back into our meeting.

13. From Denominations to city-wide celebrations

Jesus called a universal movement, and what came was a series of religious companies with global chains marketing their special brands of Christianity and competing with each other. Through this branding of Christianity most of Protestantism has, therefore, become politically insignificant and often more concerned with traditional specialties and religious infighting than with developing a collective testimony before the world. Jesus simply never asked people to organize themselves into denominations. In the early days of the Church, Christians had a dual identity: they were truly His church and vertically converted to God, and then organized themselves according to geography, that is, converting also horizontally to each other on earth. This means not only Christian neighbors organizing themselves into neighborhood- or house-churches, where they share their lives locally, but Christians coming together as a collective identity as much as they can for citywide or regional celebrations expressing the corporateness of the Church of the city or region. Authenticity in the neighborhoods connected with a regional or citywide corporate identity will make the Church not only politically significant and spiritually convincing, but will allow a return to the biblical model of the City-Church.

14. Developing a persecution-proof spirit

They crucified Jesus, the Boss of all the Christians. Today, his followers are often more into titles, medals and social respectability, or, worst of all, they remain silent and are not worth being noticed at all. "Blessed are you when you are persecuted," says Jesus. Biblical Christianity is a healthy threat to pagan godlessness and sinfulness, a world overcome by greed, materialism, jealousy and any amount of demonic standards of ethics, sex, money and power. Contemporary Christianity in many countries is simply too harmless and polite to be worth persecuting. But as Christians again live out New Testament standards of life and, for example, call sin as sin, conversion or persecution has been, is and will be the natural reaction of the world. Instead of nesting comfortably in temporary zones of religious liberty, Christians will have to prepare to be again discovered as the main culprits against global humanism, the modern slavery of having to have fun and the outright worship of Self, the wrong centre of the universe. That is why Christians will and must feel the "repressive tolerance" of a world which has lost any absolutes and therefore refuses to recognize and obey its creator God with his absolute standards. Coupled with the growing ideologisation, privatization and spiritualisation of politics and economics, Christians will (sooner than most think) have their chance to stand happily accused in the company of Jesus. They need to prepare now for the future by developing a persecution-proof spirit and an even more persecution-proof structure.

15. The Church comes home

Where is the easiest place, say, for a man to be spiritual? Maybe again, is it hiding behind a big pulpit, dressed up in holy robes, preaching holy words to a faceless crowd and then disappearing into an office? And what is the most difficult (and therefore most meaningful) place for a man to be spiritual? At home, in the presence of his wife and children, where everything he does and says is automatically put through a spiritual litmus test against reality, where hypocrisy can be effectively weeded out and authenticity can grow. Much of Christianity has fled the family, often as a place of its own spiritual defeat, and then has organized artificial performances in sacred buildings far from the atmosphere of real life. As God is in the business of recapturing the homes, the church turns back to its roots_back to where it came from. It literally comes home, completing the circle of Church history at the end of world history.

As Christians of all walks of life, from all denominations and backgrounds, feel a clear echo in their spirit to what God's Spirit is saying to the Church, and start to hear globally in order to act locally, they begin to function again as one body. They organize themselves into neighborhood

house-churches and meet in regional or city-celebrations. You are invited to become part of this movement and make your own contribution. Maybe your home, too, will become a house that changes the world.

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