

011 The Church to be The Church Part 2

As we continue our study of the New Testament church, I trust you can begin to see that so much of what we call church and church life is far removed from the design of church life that the Lord himself through the Holy Spirit put in place.

We will continue to outline the operation of the New Testament church and pick up where the previous study left off.

THE POWER.

Col 4:3-4

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Paul is asking the Christians at Colossi to pray for doors to open so that he, although in prison, could proclaim the gospel of Christ clearly and effectively.

Eph 6:18-20

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Paul is again asking the church in Ephesus to do the same thing because he knows the power in prayer changes things.

Acts 12:11-14

Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating."

*When this had dawned on him, he went to **the house** of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and **were praying**.*

Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

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Acts 4:31-33

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

THE EFFECT

II Thes 1:11-12

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith.

We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The effect of a continuous prayer lifestyle is a changed life.

A life that is fulfilled because it has purpose, a purpose motivated by faith and an increasing passion to have Christ glorified in our lives.

The effect of a consistent prayer life is a dedicated life to His call and commission. A life that is willing to be laid down that He might be glorified because of the close intimate relationship that has developed through prayer fellowship.

The effect through corporate prayer is that our own wills and ambitions are laid down and a true fellowship, heart to heart relationship is built between us and we share each other burdens and seek to fulfill each other's needs. Just like the early church who were willing to sell what they had and share it so that none were in need.

This does call for intimate fellowship and closer relationships, an environment where this type of love and commitment can grow and develop.

It starts in your families and then in your house groups, again just the same as the early church. It worked powerfully then and it can work just as powerfully now, if we desire in our generation, what Christ desires for our generation.

Beloved, traditional forms of religious activities are not going to work any more in this age and for this generation.

There is an increasing challenge on The Church. Many in places like China and the old USSR know what those challenges are like. They learned the secret and the amazing growth and success in living out Church life the way the Head of the Church – Jesus –

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through the Holy Spirit designed it to be. For many of us in more open societies, we as yet have not had to face those hardships and challenges, but it doesn't hold that we won't in the near future. In many subtle ways the challenges have already started.

Christian Judges here in the US are being forced to remove the 10 commandments from their courts, Anti Christian subjects are already being taught in schools now. The challenge to normal church life and leadership I mentioned in an earlier study regarding 'gay's' is growing. The courts are upholding the rights of gays over the rights of the Church.

It's no use waiting until the challenge to hold church services in church buildings is here before we conform to the Lords design of church life we need to obey now and we shall be ready and able for whatever the world tries – and it will – through at us.

We must be committed to conform to His design and pattern for the church and lay our own ideas and history down.

This is time for very radical Christianity and it starts in the homes, your home, with your family first. Men must rise up in their households and become the God appointed leaders of their household and lead the family in the things of God.

This same principle must increase in the house groups or oasis groups or church in the house or whatever you call it, where there is **Apostolic teaching. Real fellowship. Breaking of bread, Continuous prayer, Generous giving which will lead to Increase.**

There is no-where in scripture where special people, holding special office, wearing special clothes, saying special words are the only ones to hold communion or breaking bread.

I challenge EVERY head of the household that before one week has passed, you will have held household prayer and household breaking of bread in the middle of having dinner.

If you are single then my challenge to you is that you find someone or more than one who is single and have prayer and breaking of bread together. If that is not possible then either have communion at home alone or see if you can join with a couple. I am not talking about doing this in the house groups. Yes of cause there you must, but I am talking households firstly.

5. GIVING

Acts 2:44-45

All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

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Giving in today's world is a strange thing. It is something we love to do and yet don't want to do it.

From the pulpits, over the airwave and through the mail there is an attitude of obligation put on people. There is a guilt trip put on the saints. Now we get it through email. If you do this and send that and forward this email to ten people then you are going to receive a blessing. I hate this garbage and I delete every one.

There is a total worldly type of manipulation of people. There is the enticement of people; if you give to this ministry then we will send you this fantastic useless gift with your name on it. We will enter you in our prayer box and pray for your financial blessing and on and on it goes. We have this need and that need please help us or we will have to close and then what will God think of you then? I call these people 'dung spreaders' although there is a modern term for it, which I shall not use here. Oh God save us from these people.

Then there is the resistance on our part to give.
Well I don't know if I believe in tithing? Well if I don't believe in it then I won't have to do it.

I believe in tithing but is it on the gross salary or the net? Well, I believe it's the net so I won't have to pay so much.

Well if their in need then let them get a better job or curb their spending or they need to get a grip on their finances or they need to come up in class a peg or two.
Well of course it's not my responsibility after all, is it.

The truth is, it has nothing to do with any of that at all.
But it most certainly does have **EVERYTHING** to do with our attitude and response to JESUS.

1 Cor 6:19-20

*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? **You are not your own; you were bought at a price.** Therefore honor God with your body.*

If we are not even our own then it stands to reason that everything we have is not ours either. We have only been entrusted with it use.
So, when we give we are giving away **HIS** money, not ours, that's why we can do it so cheerfully, we're giving someone else's stuff away!!

So in our scripture:

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WHO GAVE?

Verse 44 tell us that they ALL gave. There is no exception to giving. It is a joy and service that all participate in because we are all one body.

Obviously there were degrees in giving.

2 Cor 8:12-13

*For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what **one has**, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality.*

So you see it is the spirit of giving, the willingness to give whatever is available at that particular time. It is the response to the heart of the Lord Jesus that is so vital and HE sees whether that response is from a heart of love and thanksgiving.

WHO RECEIVED?

The simplest term is EVERYONE.

Every one who was in need and those who gave were truly blessed and shall know their reward, which will be for eternity.

Yes some people might need help with their stewardship and handling their finances, but that should not stop the meeting of the need along with help and advice.

GIVING WAS ALWAYS TO PEOPLE.

Phil 4:15-20

Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It's funny how often we quote the last two lines of that passage and forget that the promise is based on the previous verses, which is our giving out first.

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2 Cor 8:1-7

*1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. **Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints.** And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything-- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us-- see that you also excel in this grace of giving.*

We have to acknowledge that nowhere in the New Testament are we instructed nor encouraged to give other than to the support of **people** in ministry.

NOTHING REGARDING BUILDINGS.

Now I have to be careful here. I want to emphasis this one thing. This is my own thought and opinion. This is not company policy. This is just me!

If you added up all the cost of building, running and maintaining religious buildings across the US alone over the past 100 years, and you add up all the support given to people in Christian Ministry, my guess is that the building cost's far out way the support of people, probably 4 to 1. Now I have no factual evidence, but it doesn't take a genius to work it out.

Don't you realize that your plush and unbelievably expensive church buildings are going to be burned up in the Last Day when God dissolves the world? Then he is going to ask how good a steward were you of HIS money – watching it all burn up, when it could have been invested in people, reaching the unsaved now as precious stones that will last for eternity. Even an accountant or investor will see the long term is always the way to go. – It also happens to be the Lord's way as head of the church – He didn't die to have buildings, he died to save people for eternity.

Who do you believe is behind the effective diversion away from people who are the voices of Christ to the world, of such vast sums of money? Certainly not Christ.

Have you ever heard of a person seeing a religious building and falling on their knees and getting saved because of that building? I certainly haven't. There are however more people than we have any idea of that have heard the gospel and been saved because some people have invested their money in others enabling them to go with the gospel.

That Is 100% New Testament.

6. INCREASE

Acts 2:47

...Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Jesus said that HE would build His church. We are also told of the Increase of His Government and Kingdom there will be no end.

There is a divine motion in operation that nothing in heaven or hell can stop. Our responsibility is to cooperate with Him and through you His kingdom shall increase.

THROUGH LIFE STYLE.

Matt 5:16

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Acts 4:13

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

John 13:34-35

A new command *I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* This is a command directly from the Head of the Church. It is not optional.

There will be a small series further in our studies on the 'Forgotten Command' by a dear friend and teacher Gaylord Enns who has written a great book on this title.

Acts 4:32-37

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them.

For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

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Acts 5:12-16

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade.

No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people.

*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. **Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed.***

There was something dynamic about the lifestyle that demonstrated true love and fellowship which released **power in their midst** that the Lord was able to do exceedingly above all that they could ask or even think.

These were incredible days as their whole way of living changed to that of self-sacrifice for the salvation of others.

THROUGH PROCLAMATION

Acts 5:41-44 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

Acts 6:7

So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 8:1

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

Notice it was the people who were scattered, not the apostles. With that in mind follow on in the next verses.

Acts 8:4-8

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed. So there was great joy in that city.

It didn't matter what happened to the people they just went on proclaiming that Jesus is the Lord and people came to Christ daily. It was the ordinary people like you and I that

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went, proclaimed, healed and brought deliverance in all places. Amidst the persecution was also great joy at being counted worthy to suffer for His name and also at seeing so many come to believe.

THROUGH INVOLVEMENT

This is where things ALL CHANGE.

Rom 15:2-7

Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself but as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

1 Cor 14:26

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

Beloved the day of the one-man band is long gone. As far as the Lord and the Holy Spirit is concerned, it never began. The concept of "The Pastor" as is presented and operates today, is totally and completely foreign to any New Testament teaching. We are a living body and a Living organism that we all function in and take our respective rolls under the leadership of Christ Jesus.

Now that doesn't mean we don't have leaders but as we have read so often in scripture like the following verse;

Eph 4:11-16

*It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then **we will** no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, **we will** in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by **every supporting ligament**, grows and builds **itself up** in love, **as each part does its work**.*

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Beloved, there is no 'one man pastor' stuff there

A few months ago I was looking on a church website in a small town up in the mountains here in Northern California. Their minister who had been there for 12 years was moving to another field of service.

They had set up a committee to oversee the search for a new minister. (Oh God save us from committee's, you do realize that a camel is a horse designed by a committee!!) Sorry could not resist that one!

As I went through the qualifications and requirements they had in place for the new man, I thought about Jesus, Peter, James, John, Paul, and Timothy and was saddened to realize that not one of them was qualified to lead this church.

The thing that saddened me most was that after twelve years, the previous minister had not disciplined one single person and equipped them to take over from him. That is nothing but religious garbage in action. It demonstrates a total failure of the 21st Century church to have anything in common with the New Testament Church.

It is through all of us taking on our full responsibility in the home and in the local fellowship body along with other local church bodies harmonizing together that there will be true increase because it is and will be "The Glorious Church" The "Church Triumphant" The "Bride adorned for the Bridegroom Jesus".

Beloved this is the Divine Destiny set by Almighty God. We have to start doing things HIS way, by the power of HIS Spirit taking on the full responsibility that is ours to be what he wants us to be and do the work he wants us to do.

If this generation doesn't do this then He will raise up the next to do it and you and I will have missed out. That is too tragic a thing to contemplate.

But remember The Lord has said, "I WILL build my church" God is for real and it is time we were too.

See you in the next study if you have the stamina!