

General Topics :: Early Church Service vs American Church Service

Early Church Service vs American Church Service - posted by Mattie, on: 2006/4/1 18:18

I am eager to hear opinions to this topic. 1 Corinthians 12-14 gives us a brief glimpse into an early church gathering. 1 Corinthians 12 talks of the purpose for gathering to be the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 13 describes different manifestations of the Spirit through each member of the body for the purpose of edifying one another, whether it's a prophetic word, a word of wisdom, a healing, etc. But the purpose of what I want to emphasize is 1 Corinthians 14:26 where it says "How is it then brethren? WHENEVER YOU COME TOGETHER (he's obviously talking about a corporate church gathering), EACH OF YOU has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." Ephesians and Colossians also talk of "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" and Acts 2:42-46 tells us that the church met from house to house breaking bread and fellowshiping. It's interesting that Paul says "each of you" and yet this is hardly seen in much of the American church today. Today we only see a manifestation of Christ through 2 or 3 members within the body while everyone sits back and watches. It's usually the preacher, the choir and the announcements. While preaching isn't wrong, a choir isn't wrong or announcements aren't wrong, is this a full picture of what 1 Cor 14 church is? While I am open to correction, I am of the opinion that much taking place in corporate worship today is a spectator mode. We come in, we find our pew, nobody bothers us, we enjoy the service, and we leave. But in the early church there is a corporate expression of Christ.. "each of you" Christ has something deposited in each member to reveal of Himself during a service. What does everyone think? Eager to hear opinions.

Re: Early Church Service vs American Church Service - posted by Greenquality, on: 2006/4/2 10:32

I would say the early church gathered together, prayed and read old testament scripture. as the gifts from God poured forth, to give witness on to the truth, of Christ.

Re: Early Church Service vs American Church Service - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/2 11:11

I would say, "you're singing my song". But more correct would be, "you're singing God's song". Oh that we could go back to our roots and find our life in Him. Praise God.

But then, what would the poor pastor do for a livelihood....make tents? Oh heavens no, that would never do. I'm not downing pastors, but please saints, we must realize that what we are doing today is falling way short of God's expectations of fruit harvested for His glory, now ours. For more on this, see me post "Paul said....I'm afraid" in the Lounge. Thanks, and God bless you. When we do things God's way, we get God's kind of results. When we follow our own way, we lead others into the ditch.

Immersed in Christ Jesus,

Onesimus4God

Re: - posted by Graftedbranc, on: 2006/4/2 12:42

Quote:
-----I would say, "you're singing my song". But more correct would be, "you're singing God's song". Oh that we could go back to our roots and find our life in Him. Praise God.

I like Ephesians 4:16:

"Out from whom all the body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the body unto the building of itself in love".

The body is built up not just by the joints (plural) of the rich supply but also by the operation in the measure of each one part.

There is little reality and little growth of the body of Christ today because the body is not allowed to function. We have a program, a set agenda of hymns, a prepared sermon by a "professional" minister and believers sit in pews silent, followi

ng a program and do not function in the meetings of the church.

There is a religious system in place, held in rule by tradition, maintained by the rule of the tithe, and the body of Christ is starved because it is denied the measure of each one part and cannot build itself up.

Until this system is denied, left, dismantled, or whatever and the body of Christ meets simply as members of Christ with one Head, functioning in the Divine Life for the building up of the body, God will not have His purpose fulfilled, His hearts desire realized, or the testimony of Christ in this earth.

This system is completely forign to the New Testament and the early church who met day by day and house to house in prayer, the breaking of bread, fellowship, and the apostles teaching.

Lord Jesus, give us Reality, and enable your members to function and bring into experience the reality of Your body, your headship and your hearts desire.

Graftedbranch

Re: Early Church Service vs American Church Service - posted by IRONMAN (), on: 2006/4/2 14:22

bro Mattie

the Lord has shown me the same thing concerning what happens when we get together. The Lord had me read a book called pagan Christianity by Frank viola which researches some of the common practices in Christianity today. the vast majority have no new testament roots at all but come from paganism.

of course we practise very very little if any real 1st century Christianity. of course people will say "well that was then and this is now" and out of the other side of their mouths "God is the same yesterday, today and forever" The priest and pastor (protestant priest) is typically who we hear from and this practice is from the greek tradition of oratory. evidently the early Church gatherings were typified by the Lord moving through the different members present in various ways yet this is rarely done today. Even the practise of building churches is modeled after pagan temples. the early church met where they could, in each other's homes, synagogues, wildernesses, wherever God brought them together. do you know it costs about 18% on average of the total donations for each church to maintain their buildings? This is in pagan Christianity by the way.

what the Lord is going to do and He has shown me this and many others is that all this which we hold dear, our edifices, programs, style of worship, the Lord is going to destroy and sweep away to make way for what He had the first century Church do. the community as it was in acts is coming back but after the violent destruction of this farce that dares to be called Christianity.

What the Lord has shown me is in 2007 this economy will collapse leaving many churches and saints high and dry without job or money. this will be the undoing of the prosperity gospel and you will see people get ugly over this. a lot of churches will have their properties foreclosed on leaving congregants disillusioned and bitter with no place to gather. those that would continue on in the faith will have to band together to survive. This is how the Lord will get us back in gear. Pastors or shepherds of flocks who aren't doing what the Lord would have them do in terms of feeding His sheep and are fleeing them instead will be removed in scandal or death unless they repent.

i look forward to the day when we begin to behave as the Church we should have been.

Lord conform us to yourself by any means necessary.AMEN.

Re: - posted by IRONMAN (), on: 2006/4/2 14:27

bro onesimus4God

as for what the pastors would do for livelihood, making tents isn't a bad vocation. of course they are entitled to some measure of support from the flock, after all Paul did tell the romans (i think it was, or was it the corinthians?) that he was entitled to something from them but he didn't want to burden them further so he worked. personally if the Lord were to send me out like He did Paul, i'd rather work so i don't burden the flock but of course any support is welcome!

Re: - posted by IRONMAN (), on: 2006/4/2 17:51

bro Graftedbranch

Quote:
-----There is little reality and little growth of the body of Christ today because the body is not allowed to function. We have a program, a set agenda of hymns, a prepared sermon by a "professional" minister and believers sit in pews silent, following a program and do not function in the meetings of the church.

indeed bro, if the rest of the body isn't involved, there can be no growth. you know it reminds me of the expression "use it or lose it" as it pertains to muscles. if the whole body isn't made use of ie the congregation, then it simply wastes away.

Quote:
-----There is a religious system in place, held in rule by tradition, maintained by the rule of the tithe, and the body of Christ is starved because it is denied the measure of each one part and cannot build itself up.

the current religious system has been fashioned by the powers of the air influencing men as an opposing force or counterfeited to the true Church of God. it is perpetuated by the system of seminaries and so on and holds to various traditions of men at the expense of the commandments of God given to us through bro Paul. Christ said this to the Pharisees in matt hew 15

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, 2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. 3 But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. 5 But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; 6 And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. 7 Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, 8 This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. 9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men

we are indeed guilty of valuing the traditions of men more than the commandments of God and we shall surely reap the reward for that. nonetheless the Lord will reduce this to nothing that we may worship and gather as He would have us do .

Quote:
-----Until this system is denied, left, dismantled, or whatever and the body of Christ meets simply as members of Christ with one Head, functioning in the Divine Life for the building up of the body, God will not have His purpose fulfilled, His hearts desire realized, or the testimony of Christ in this earth.

we ourselves will not give it up or deny it since we have grown up in it and are well-accustomed to it. God will instead rip it from us and trample it before our eyes such that we will have no choice but to revert to the primitive Acts type community.

Quote:
-----Lord Jesus, give us Reality, and enable your members to function and bring into experience the reality of Your body, your headship and your hearts desire.

yea and amen bro. you do realize this means death to the current system right?

Re: body life - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/3 7:40

The "Body Life"
by Dene McGriff

I titled this the "Body Life" to contrast it to the traditional church or home meeting. Christians get fixated on meetings – the where, when and how. They can see how the home meeting can be intimate and participatory but can't imagine how it would work in a larger meeting.

I would not have believed it if I hadn't experienced it for a number of years – meetings with upwards of 200 or 300 people or more in a large hall that was totally unscripted because the Holy Spirit was in control. There was no "order of worship". Anyone could begin by a prayer, a song, a testimony. Very often the Holy Spirit led us corporately in a single theme. Anyone was free to participate at any time. There was no chaos. There was order. The chairs were in a circle. There was no podium. There were elders but they were not visible or obvious. If something got off track, they would bring it back, but they were truly there to facilitate rather than dominate. The spirit and attitude everyone had was to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, to sense what to do when – whether to pick a song, read from the Bible, pray, praise, testify or teach. Most understood that they were there to glorify God and to share what the Lord had done in our lives that week. The meetings were fresh and often glorious.

This is not to say we didn't have some bad meetings, people sharing inappropriately, etc. but that's what leadership is all about. When someone goes off track or just plain "off the wall", the mature saints need to be sensitive to the Lord and bring it back into the flow of the Spirit. This is not heavy handed or dictatorial. The meeting is still in the hands of all the saints who are free to share a hymn, a psalm, a testimony, pray, etc.

So what can the pastor do who wants to turn his church around from the dead one man show to a living body? The pastor may tell people, "okay, folks, I'm going to shut up for the next month. I'm just here to encourage you." Function follows form. Take away the pulpit. Put the chairs in a circle. Begin to announce a couple of weeks before hand the reason for the change and how it will work, emphasizing the need for all to have fresh experiences and light from the Lord to share. Encourage them to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit as to which song to pick, when and what to share. Keep prayers and testimonies "short, quick, real and fresh" (as we used to say). If someone drones on for a while without much real to say, it will kill the meeting and interrupt the Spirit's flow.

Christians grow when they let the life of Jesus they have experienced flow out to others. This can happen in large meetings or small. It may take a little time and prodding to get people used to the idea, but it can be done.

Most of these meetings fall flat on their face. Why? A "body life" meeting is only as good as our walk with the Lord. If we are living in the past, living off of experiences we had last month or ten years ago, we are going to be in for a rude awakening. It may sound trite to say that we need to "have a fresh experience of Christ" daily, but it is true. Many people can tell old "war stories" for hours on end, how the Lord did this or that for them years ago. But what counts is what the Lord did in my life today, this week - not last year or 30 years ago. An interesting thing about a body life meeting is that there is no place to hide. You are exposed. If your experience is stale, your sharing will smell like a stale ash tray to you and others the minute you open your mouth.

Why do we end up with big meetings and professional speakers? In the traditional service, there is nothing to do, nothing to prepare for. It takes the heat off. We can hide and don't have to deal with our shallowness and lack of reality.

• Unless we can get to the point where we can be honest about where we are spiritually...

• Unless we can get to the point where we can really touch the Lord regularly in prayer and in the Word...

• Unless we get to the point where each and everyone of us can have fresh daily experiences with the Lord, fresh revelation of our own, rather than someone else's,

our meetings are bound to be pitiful because they reflect our poor walk with the Lord.

This is foreign to the average Christian, because we are used to being passively entertained. Just the thought of having to share with others is scary to some. I know through years of experience what works and what doesn't. The only way a person will move from knowledge to reality is through the constant loving support of a group of brothers and sisters he/she trusts and knows are there to help rather than condemn. This kind of dynamic can only be achieved in body life meet

ings. Saints need an opportunity to participate meaningfully in each meeting. It's the little things - the things you are thankful for, how much the Lord means to you, how He pulled off a little miracle at work, how He let you share Him with someone. Once all the members of the body get released, people finally get the idea.

There is no such thing as a bad meeting or blaming someone else. The meeting depends on me. If the meeting is dead, it's because I had no life to bring to it. What did I contribute? If someone was obviously down and out, how did I help? What can I say? How can I pray for them this week? The best part about an open fellowship is there is no one to blame but me. That's why they work - and don't work.

In a very real sense, there is no "right" or "wrong" way to meet. God doesn't care about methods. He gives us very little instruction on what to do and how to do it. The question is, is the meeting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Are there mature leaders who can sense the flow of the Spirit and move with it? Now I am not talking in the sense of something "extra-Biblical", voices, miracles, signs and wonders. I am talking about the ability of a small group of people to let the Spirit of God lead them in prayer, worship, song and testimonies. One will find that there is often an unspoken or unrecognized theme that the Spirit will lead in a meeting and that everything will relate to it - without planning and without an agenda. For example, the Lord may impress us this week with his mercy so the songs, testimonies, scripture and prayer will all relate to that theme.

Think of the Holy Spirit as the conductor of an orchestra and each one of us is an instrument that He plays. He has worked in our lives during the week, ministered to us through His word and through experience, and now we bring that to the meeting and offer it up to the Lord as a "sweet smelling sacrifice unto the Lord." The meeting reflects the fresh moving and working of the Lord in each of our lives.

The Place of Leadership

Leadership is there to sense the moving of the Lord - not to carry out their planned order of business, not to follow an outline or course of study, or even verses that were picked the previous week. Leadership should be there to sense the move of the Lord "real time" as they say in computer jargon. Our relationship with the Lord should be living and powerful, not programmed and planned.

If there is one main reason a small meeting won't work, it is the lack of effective mature leadership. Looking back I can see that when there was mature, directed, visionary leadership, the meetings didn't get too far off track and people matured dramatically. Saints weren't just little birds with their mouths open to be fed. They quickly became foragers, bringing in what they had gleaned during the week so they could feed others. That was the secret to their growth. It is also the reason why the present day church is so atrophied. People come to be fed rather than to feed others.

The goal of leadership should not be to "lead by dominating," or doing everything for everyone so things will be comfortable. The goal of leadership should be to facilitate so others can come forth, mature, share and function. The goal of leadership should be to keep things on track, provide discernment and protection when strangers come in and provide a safe environment for growth. They provide "on the job" training because there is a real opportunity to practice every meeting. I hear pastors say their goal is to train so the people will take over but for some reason this never happens. The training never ends and, even more important, the opportunity is never made available for the average saint to minister to others.

As long as we let the professionals, the gifted and the mature run the show, the less chance the little guy will ever grow up and mature. I will grant you there are things to learn, but we seem to have forgotten that until the last hundred years or so, we got along fine without Bible Schools and Seminaries, commentaries and "how to" books. Today, most people can read. The best training we can have is our Bible, our daily walk with the Lord and the encouragement of one another. We already have among us gifts to the body, every day saints with no formal training: pastors - shepherds with a heart for people, evangelists with the gift for sharing Christ with others, teachers, exhorters, people given to hospitality, visiting the sick, helping others. They are all gifts to the body for its building up. None require a degree, special ordination or any such thing.

Yet, we have professionalized everything. We are a society of specialization. It used to be that a smart, educated person could get a job and learn the specifics needed on the job. Now, the person needs a masters degree or doctorate with a super specialization to even get a foot in the door. It is no different in Christianity. Just look at the catalogue of majors available in the typical seminary. We make the additional error of thinking that just because someone has studied and specialized in an area, he or she is an expert. The Christian life is 10 percent knowledge and 90 percent experience. We

That is real is what the Lord has worked into you, not what you have learned.

Although what I am about to say is a generalization and I admit that generalizing is dangerous, here goes. This super specialization and professionalization of Christianity has only reinforced the feeling that there are "full-time, committed Christian workers" and "part-time less committed lay people." Although there are many exceptions, I think the generalization holds, and this is not to take away from the dedicated "full-time" professional. Full-time Christians have to do several things at the very least: give up their "secular" job and go to Bible School or Seminary for training and then prove their dedication by taking a much lower paying job than if they were on the "outside." Again, the last point is not always true, but usually - we hypocritically expect the "full-time" Christian to live on far less than we do. There are always a small number of committed "lay" people but the rest are mere spectators. Modern churches are like the old saying, "The rich get richer and the poor get poorer". Those who are the most involved are the most blessed. If a person is "on the spot" every week, he has to produce so he grows in the Lord. The key is to give everyone meaningful opportunity to be involved so all grow.

Bible School and Seminary is not the way of the Lord. As one brother recently said, in three and a half years the disciples went from fisherman to apostles. Being a pastor, teacher or evangelist should have nothing to do with our education and training but the working of God in our lives. Saints are given gifts for the body. The teacher, prophet or evangelist in your midst will become evident. A person does need to study and be grounded in the Word but he doesn't have to spend years in Bible School and Seminary. They need to be equally grounded in life and experience with the Lord, not just knowledge. The true servant will be evident to everyone. You don't need a doctorate to be able to minister, to teach or evangelize but you do need an anointed, empowered life.

http://www.the-tribulation-network.com/denemcgriff/Issues/body_life.htm

Re: experiment in church life - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/3 7:42

An Experiment in "Church Life"

by Dene McGriff

Is a dynamic living church life where everyone is a participant rather than a spectator, where everyone brings a psalm, a hymn, a testimony or revelation, even possible in these days? This has been described in Chapters 18-20 in the book *Recognizing Apostasy and Deception*, but is it possible today? Where would I find such a living community of saints? How could I be a part of such a "body life"? Where do I find it?

The problem is that Christians don't know what to do. They don't know where to turn. It is an oxymoron to say that Christians tend to be found in churches. That's what they do. That's where they go for fellowship. But when they get there they find a stultifying, self-perpetuating organization - not a living organism where every member functions. The pastor sits on top of the hierarchy (even though there may be a board of some sort). He is expected to do the heavy spiritual lifting - the counseling, the message on Sunday, the organization and all the rest that goes into running a "church". Members find themselves relegated to less than meaningful tasks of ushering, passing the offering plate, setting up chairs, working in the nursery, teaching Sunday School (the only legitimate spiritual function so far) and baking casseroles for potlucks. Other than that, they follow along with the order of worship - sing the songs selected by the music group, pray along with the pastor's invocations and listen attentively to the message and so on.

I'm not attacking the pastors. They are doing their best. They are doing what they are expected to do. That's their job. But I am attacking the pastoral system because it perpetuates what is basically a one man show and keeps the rest of the members from having a meaningful opportunity for outflow and ministry. So how can we change the system?

The Problem

A friend, Pastor Joe, came to me and said, "Something is wrong in my church. We are going through the motions but don't seem to be growing. I'm so tired. I give it my best week after week but we don't seem to be really getting anywhere. Using the old analogy, I've been working my tail off fishing, cooking and serving it up to the congregation, but I'm not teaching anyone else to fish. So what if the Lord gives me fresh revelation week after week? Why can't others have the same experience? I seem to be dragging folks along and I'm getting tired. What can I do to revitalize my church?"

I looked at him and said, "Has it ever occurred to you that many in your congregation, especially the younger ones, are

chomping at the bit to be more involved, to share what the Lord is doing in their lives, but they just don't have an opportunity? Do you know that many don't even want to invite their unsaved friends to the service because they don't think it is relevant to them? Do you know that many in the church have a real desire to start up their own ministries but don't know how? Do you know that many members are looking for something more, especially the older Christians who have heard the same thing over and over again?"

"Well yes," he said, "I know that some feel that way. When I read the Bible, the early church doesn't seem to have much resemblance to what we are doing today. How do we get people more involved? How do we get them into the Word so they can learn how to get fresh revelation from God? How do we get them into ministry? In seminary they teach us how to start programs, identify "spiritual gifts" with surveys and such, but it doesn't seem to be working. I know you said you had experienced something akin to the "early church life", in your past, so do you have any suggestions? What can I do?"

"Pastor Joe, the problem is not easily solved. You have to be willing to radically change the way you think and do things. Your congregation is going to have to be willing to completely change the way they think about "church" and your role in it. It is going to take some time, some training and relearning. You have to see that your job is to equip the saints so they can minister. Your church needs to become a living ministering church – to one another and to the world around. I'm willing to help, but are you willing to do what it takes?"

Pastor Joe looked at me and said, "you know Dene, I'm willing to do anything. I am so tired of doing it all, I'm about ready to quit. I've been at this for twenty years and I feel like I have failed. The same loyal core is there but the rest of the congregation seems to be living on milk, if you will – just going through the motions. I'm willing to do anything even if it means working my self out of a job. I want to see people growing in Christ and ministering to one another. What can I do? Will you help?"

The Transformation

"Joe, you are about to turn your church upside down so we need to lay a little ground work and take it step by step. You can't stop doing what everyone has been used to over night." We talk a little about the church, their services, meeting times and so forth and decide that the best way to begin is on Sunday evening. We will fellowship before hand and do a "tag team" meeting where we will begin to lay it out to those most interested.

I meet with Pastor Joe and the elders and deacons to lay out the plan. There is some skepticism but basically support for going forward with the plan. I assure the leaders that this isn't a gimmick or just another program, but will require their commitment and support. The goal is to turn the whole church from an organization into a functioning organism.

Joe announces to his church the next Sunday morning that in a week on Sunday evening we are going to start having special meetings with the goal of having a meeting where everyone has an opportunity to participate. That won't happen the first meeting which will lay the groundwork with the help of their "church" consultant and they introduce me.

Before the meeting begins, the chairs are placed in a circle. There is no leader to look to – only the Lord, and you find that removing chairs from rows facing the pulpit will redirect attention and expectations.

Week #1

The first week, there is a pretty good turn out which includes the core leadership and about a third of the adults in a church of about 400. I begin, "over the next few weeks, you are going to experience the "church life" in much the same way as the early church, but we are not the early church. There is a couple of thousand years under this bridge. A lot has happened. Precedent has been set and accepted so we are going to look at what the Bible teaches about meeting and practice doing it ourselves. You are going to find a new and fresh relationship with the Lord. You will learn how to feed on the Word of God and get your own fresh revelation. You will learn how to practice the presence of God, live in the Spirit, hear His voice and follow His leading. You will be so full of a fresh experience with the Lord, you will be dying to come here and share what the Lord has done in your life with your brothers and sisters in Christ. This will become the most exciting time of the week as you look forward to sharing the Lord in your life and seeing what the Lord is doing in everyone of your friends here. Your relationship with the Lord and one another will go to new levels you have never before imagined.

“You know this intellectually, but now you have to experience it. Church is not something you go to. Church is what you are. You are members of His body, members of one another. Every part is important.

14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be?

20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. 23 And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, 24 but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (I Corinthians 12: 14-26)

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

In fact, you need to be connected to the body for life. We supply life to one another. Every part does its share for the building up of itself in love.

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)

“The church meeting should be the expression of the reality of Christ we have experienced during the week. This does not mean the radio program we heard, the Christian book we read or the wonder experience we had five years ago at camp. No, the meeting is the fruit of what we have experienced this week. And when we come together, we all have something to bring to the meeting. We come...

filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:18-20)

26 How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (I Cor 14:26)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

I go on to say that their goal in the next week is to experience the Lord by spending time in the Word and letting Him speak to them, by prayer and praise, by praying for one another, by obeying the prompting of the Spirit to do something for someone or speak to someone about the Lord. They are to come back with a prayer, a word, a song, a psalm.

Week #2

The format for the second week is to give them a little teaching beginning with one of the most basic things — the three part nature of man. Most Christians don’t understand the concept and confuse the soul (the mind, will and emotions) and the spirit (the conscience, intuition and fellowship). Christians think that increase in knowledge will make them more spiritual or they want to “feel” God’s presence. Certainly the soul is important, but the Lord dwells in the “human spirit” — the holy of holies within man, the part that is “born again”. So many get saved — that is, their human spirit is made alive but they go on in their soul or flesh. I could write a book on this, but the key is in I John 1. God is

light and we need to learn to walk in the light (verse 7). What does this mean practically? It means that we open our heart and let the Holy Spirit shine His light into our conscience. We confess our sins and can then enter into fellowship with God.

I know this may sound pretty basic but most Christians don't realize how important this is. Dealing with our conscience and letting the blood of Jesus cleanse us is the starting point for fellowship. Then, when you read the Bible, the verses jump out at you. You will have that quiet intimate fellowship with the Lord and then your "intuition" clicks on and the Lord speaks to you in that still small voice, perhaps telling you about something in your life that needs to be dealt with, or something you need to do or a decision you need to make. The human spirit is like the switch on the light. It takes practice. This is what your pastor does (whether he explains it in these terms or not) when he goes to the Lord. If you feel the Lord is far away and there is no fellowship, the Bible is clear, there is only one thing that stands between you and the Lord — unconfessed sin.

Anyway, this is basic to the Christian life. The next thing we do is start a practice "body life" meeting. The first thing we are going to do is to open our hearts to the Lord and ask Him to shine His light in us. If there is anything to confess, we do — quietly between each one and the Lord. Then we take a few minutes to praise and thank Him for who He is and what He is doing. I tell everyone the object isn't to offer a 20 minute prayer, but to conversationally talk to the Lord being sensitive to the Spirit's leading of the whole body and to pray in a few sentences following the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is in our midst as an orchestra leader and the Lord will inhabit our praises. You will sense His presence. He may lead one person to start the whole group in worship through a song. Another follows with another song. Others will be led to intersperse singing with prayer.

Then we open it up for everyone to share what the Lord did in their lives this week. We are amazed at some of the wonderful testimonies. We encourage folks to keep them short and sweet so everyone has an opportunity. We also encourage everyone to enter in and just like any family, you will have some off the wall things occur just like they would at a family dinner with a table full of kids from preschoolers to high school. But we learn by doing.

An interesting outcome is that the Holy Spirit convicts if we are sharing "head" rather than "heart" knowledge... if the Lord really worked in our lives or we were just making it up. But at the end of the meeting, we are all challenged to go back to the drawing boards and endeavor to let the Lord work more fully in our lives the next week.

Subsequent Weeks

This way of meeting may be foreign to us but we don't get in a rut. We vary the format. Sometime, we begin with just quiet for a few minutes trying to sense the move of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we may be led to worship in prayer — others just in song or other times people are so anxious to share they start popping up excitedly with testimonies. You will find that the more sensitive everyone becomes to the Holy Spirit, the more a meeting will flow with a theme and you discover that the Lord is dealing with many on the same thing or He is leading everyone to thank Him for His faithfulness or worthiness and the songs, prayers and testimonies will follow so beautifully as you are led in worship.

As time goes on, people understand they don't come to a meeting to GET but to GIVE. If a meeting falls flat (as sometimes happens), it is God's way of exposing us as Christians acting the part rather than living it. The meeting should represent the surplus, the culmination of what the Lord did in our lives. We should come full of praise, worship and testimonies because we experience a living God...not just a few of us, not just the pastor and a few leaders but every single member. We need to learn how to let the life of Christ flow through us in love and building up for one another. We are not there to receive, criticize or evaluate but to share the riches of Christ.

Ephesians 3 sums it up pretty well:

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

1. It talks about being strengthened through His Spirit in the inner man (the human spirit we talked about).

2. The word comprehend also means “apprehend with all the Saints”. We comprehend and apprehend the love of Christ with all of the saints not as lone rangers.

3. Glory is to Him by the church – not the stained glassed buildings, but the blood washed saints – that church – not a mere building but “a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21-22)

There is so much to show the saints that the church is organic, not an organization and is dependent upon the function of all of the members. He also gives gifts for the equipping of the saints. The secret to the church life is when every member discovers their gift, whether in prophecy, serving, teaching, giving, evangelizing, exhortation, etc. This comes from the working of the Holy Spirit in each member.

But we function in order and with restraint. The strong and mature ones who would normally dominate a meeting need to defer to the younger saints and encourage them to enter in. The pastor is there to strengthen and equip the body, not to do all the work but to equip the saints.

As time goes on, folks begin to catch on. There are a few bumps in the road – some trying to take advantage of the freedom, but that is where the mature leadership comes in keeping it on track. This can usually be handled by a “Thank you for sharing. Now let’s let others have a chance”.

Every meeting isn’t perfect. Think of the church as a family. Parents are there to keep order, but not to preach to their kids every meal. Children need to be given the opportunity to make mistakes and learn by doing. The church life is about opportunity and expectations. Every saint needs the opportunity to participate and we expect to see the growth of Christ in their lives.

As the saints become more accustomed to this way of meeting, the Sunday morning meeting changes as well. That’s for later.

Conclusion

So what do you think about all this? Do you think it could happen where you are? Well, I’m sorry to say, this was a very vivid dream I had this week. My prayer is that there will be some pastors out there who will have the courage to abandon the “canned” service with its “order of worship” for a Spirit-led body life experience. It can be done. I have experienced it. We need a little help, a little guidance and a little reorientation for it to happen, but it can be done.

Saints need their eyes opened to see what the church really is – the Lord working in every part... “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:16).

The antithesis of this living body of believers is a dead body of believers. Saints who come to observe and be fed once a week who have nothing to share, who have no outflow, no gifts or ministry, are dead or at least on their death bed spiritually. Let’s be honest. If Christians don’t have the opportunity and expectation of being a living, functioning member of the body of Christ, they will be dead spectating pew sitters.

My prayer is that saints across the world will discover the simplicity of the true “church life” – in contrast to the planned lecture style meeting. If the body of Christ is to be alive and relevant on the earth in these last days, every part needs to be alive and flowing the life of Christ, supplying life and encouragement to the members they are knit to and expressing that love and life corporately to the world. Our meetings need to express the living Christ working in our lives.

Feel free, if you dare to forward this on to pastors and leaders. There is a yearning in the body of Christ for something more than our traditional churches have to offer. What I shared here is far more than your typical home meeting or bible study. It is the essence of the church life. It can be experienced in large groups as well as small.

Re: last time - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/3 7:49

I promise that this will be the last time that I bring this up, but for those considering how our Lord is gathering His church together, and what true fellowship is, I would recommend "So You Don't Want to Go to Church Any More?" at <http://www.jakecolsen.com>.

It's a 13-chapter long "fictional" story, but it is filled with insight of the two authors (former pastors) concerning living in God's grace and love in total dependence and faith, and the way the body of Christ fellowships. The book also really forces the reader to question some of the ideas we have and some of the things we were always taught about "going to church." I think you'll enjoy it.

P.S. Sorry for taking over this thread. :-D

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/4 0:00

nacl,

Thank you. Thank you for your comments and for posting the two pieces. Of if the church in America could only catch this is. Yes there are many home meetings, but they have not escaped the Greek/romanistic hierarchy. They have not entered into a Christ centered and Christ led body of believers.

I've been in the good meetings and I've been in some that were not so special. But we must strive to break the mold of orthodox church and enter into a living and Spirit led body.

What really blesses my soul is that we as Americans want to participate. To do so in the Body participant church will demand a more personal and living relationship with our God. It is a win/win plan instituted by the Holy Spirit through Christ and the apostles. It's the way God designed it, and I must believe, it is the only way God will infill it.

Few churches today have ICABOD over the door. Because for God to have departed implies that He was once there. Many so called churches today have never had God there, not even once. They don't even suspect what that may be like.

Oh I would that every member of SI would read the above articles and take them to heart, take them to the Body of Christ, and let's see true revival. Glory be to God on High.

the least of all since Paul,

Onesimus4god

Re:, on: 2006/4/4 7:34

I would recommend getting your hands on some books by Frank Viola.. excellent stuff.

<http://www.ptmin.org/>

His books include:

Rethinking The Will of God: A New Look at an Old Subject

The Untold Story of the New Testament Church: An Extraordinary Guide to Understanding the New Testament

Knowing Christ Together

Rethinking The Wineskin

Who is Your Covering

Pagan Christianity (my personal favorite...)

So You Want To Start A House Church

From Nazareth to Patmos

Straight Talk To Elders

I have read some of these books, and Frank is right on the money. I would recommend his books to anyone who has noticed that there seems to be little in common between what we call "church" today, and what the church was in the first century.

Krispy

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/4 8:51

I would recommend you read this:

www.awildernessvoice.com/ConferKingdom.html

"I confer on you a kingdom"

It just does not get any better than this. If we keep on doing what we've always done, we'll keep on getting what we've always gotten. I am not looking for something new, but something old. 2000 years old. I'm looking for life in Jesus with the communion of His saints and Jesus as the head.

Thousands were added to the early church the first week. This means that they were added to the body of Christ, not some neo-church organization that is nothing more than a man centered social club of religious contentment. Yes we have some really big churches in this country and in others as well. Most are not Christ centered but are man centered. All that is said and done focus on one central figure, the pastor. Pastors hold an iron clutch on everything and there is little room, if any, for God.

You read the above piece, and I guarantee you, you'll be changed forever...for the good. I thank God that He loved me enough, and the authors enough to bless me with this. It ties up all the loose ends for me, and solidifies what God has been speaking to me for the last 15 years or more. Praise God.

immersed in Jesus and hidden in Him,

Onesimus4God

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/4/4 11:01

Great posts nacl. I really enjoyed them, and passed them on to my pastor who has seen the light of having open services, but is quite unsure of how to move us out of the "traditional" model, of which we are pretty well steeped in. If you have any recommended books on the subject of an open meeting (preferably stuff not written by Frank Viola), I'd love to check them out.

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/4 11:21

What's wrong with Frank Viola. I have not read any of his books, just want to know?

"O"

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/4/4 12:25

Frank Viola has some good things to say no doubt, but frankly (pun not intended), I found his writings to be rather shallow and short-sighted, with as little biblical basis to what he says as the criticisms he levies against the "institutional" church. Frankly, I find him to be a schismatic, and in my opinion, his writings mostly appeal to fellow schismatics. He seems to write as an ax grinder to fellow ax grinders. Edification does not seem to be his true aim. I suggest if you read his books, which do contain some good insights nevertheless, read them critically.

Re: praise the Lord!!! - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/4 12:53

Thanks for the feedback, guys.

Hallelujah! Many are beginning to see the light concerning the state of our churches. I praise God that your pastor is coming around, KingJimmy.

The awildernessvoice.com website is a great one. Plenty of good stuff to check out there.

Another wonderful resource that I just love is <http://beyondcamp.net>. Be advised that most of the articles are fairly long, but Tom Lamb (a dear brother) has experienced true freedom in our Lord. His website is sooo deep, yet sooo simple, but most importantly, everything is Bible-based (I have never seen anything like his article on the Calvinist-Arminian debate, "Obedience, freewill, and the sovereignty of God"). If you guys have a couple of minutes to read, I beg you to check it out; you won't regret it. Tom also is good at responding to emails.

Sorry, I am rambling again. Be blessed in your walk with Christ today!

Your fellow-stranger and -pilgrim,
D.

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/4 21:23

Hi,
Thanks for the tip on "beyondcamp". I the testimony and it was very good. I printed out the other article there I wanted to read. After I'm done, I hope to respond to our dear NZ brother. Thanks again for the referral.
Thank you KingJimmy for the frank input, pun intended. God bless you this day.

Immersed in Him,

Onesimus4God

Re:, on: 2006/4/5 13:06

Quote:
-----Frank Viola has some good things to say no doubt, but frankly (pun not intended), I found his writings to be rather shallow and short-sighted, with as little biblical basis to what he says as the criticisms he levies against the "institutional" church.

I found that to be partly true. I think for the most part the books I read were well founded Biblically, and extremely well documented. Pagan Christianity in particular.

Quote:
-----Frankly, I find him to be a schismatic, and in my opinion, his writings mostly appeal to fellow schismatics. He seems to write as an axe grinder to fellow axe grinders.

Since I recommended his books I guess I need to ask... do you see me as a schismatic or an axe grinder?

Quote:
-----Edification does not seem to be his true aim.

I don't know that we can judge his motivations or his heart. We're supposed to apply this to Benny Hinn... why not Frank Viola?

Quote:

-----I suggest if you read his books, which do contain some good insights nevertheless, read them critically.

Agreed... and in other threads where I have recommended his books I made the same statement. He does at times come across as having a chip on his shoulder. But that doesn't take away from the insight he has on the topic. In fact, I would recommend that we all read every book critically.

Krispy

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/4/5 16:40

nacl,

I was wondering where this Dene McGriff might reside at? My pastor is very interested in an open service, and would like to personally see a meeting of a church where such was the norm. We are hoping we can find a church in the greater Charlotte, NC area that this happens at.

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2006/4/5 17:05

Also, if anybody could point me to a church in the greater Charlotte area that meets in an open format, please let me know. And not to offend anybody, but please don't point me to any Watchman Nee/Witness Lee church/cult.

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/5 18:14

KJ,

You might see if there is an evangelical "Friends" church there. You can do this by logging on to www.quaker.org. Let us know what you find and how you fare.

"O"

Re: - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/6 0:52

Brother Dene lives in Sacramento, California. I don't know how much traveling he does, as he is not a "full-time" minister in that sense. You can always get in touch with him at Dene@the-tribulation-network.com

He may be able to help you find a body in NC, and I'm sure if you tell him about your situation, he'd be happy to offer insight and any help he can. He does answer emails, too, if you give him a couple of days. Gotta love accessible ministries..

..

May God guide your search for true body-life.

Your brother,

D.

Re: what do you think? - posted by nacl (), on: 2006/4/19 17:12

We hear a lot of discussion about how to "do church" in this day and age. The (supposed) restoration of New Testament fellowship is the focus of many spiritual searches and endeavors.

We are aware of the different house church movements. Many have read or at least heard of George Barna's book, "Revolution." Then there are the traditionalists who like church services in the traditional sense (buildings, order of service, hierarchy).

How do we deal with the fact that although the early church had no resemblance to the church down through the ages up until today, most of the people revered and respected and honored here on SI (Ravenhill, Tozer, etc.) function in the traditional church set-up?

We all recognize the power and purity of the church of Acts, but we also see the power of God working through the early

Methodist church and Salvation Army under men like John Wesley and General William Booth. What do we think of when we think of revivals? We think of men like Charles Finney or Duncan Campbell preaching and praying, and people coming to the church house.

Perhaps our question of how to "do church" is the wrong question. We all know that our first priority must be to know God intimately. Do you think that if we get our relationship with Christ our Head (Ephesians 4:15) correct that the members of the body will come together properly?

Focusing on the church itself draws our attention from the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), to Whom we should steadfastly look.

I guess I don't really know what I'm trying to say. Church-life is important, and the desire to fellowship with other believers in a way pleasing to God is a good thing. We all need each other (Ephesians 4:12-16, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, Romans 12:3-5).

Allow me to quote E.M. Bounds from the first chapter of his book "Power Through Prayer":

Quote:
-----WE are constantly on a stretch, if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the gospel. This trend of the day has a tendency to lose sight of the man or sink the man in the plan or organization. God's plan is to make much of the man, far more of him than of anything else. Men are God's method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." The dispensation that heralded and prepared the way for Christ was bound up in that man John. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." The world's salvation comes out of that cradled Son. When Paul appeals to the personal character of the men who rooted the gospel in the world, he solves the mystery of their success. The glory and efficiency of the gospel is staked on the men who proclaim it. When God declares that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him," he declares the necessity of men and his dependence on them as a channel through which to exert his power upon the world. This vital, urgent truth is one that this age of machinery is apt to forget. The forgetting of it is as baneful on the work of God as would be the striking of the sun from his sphere. Darkness, confusion, and death would ensue.

What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men -- men of prayer.

God moves through men, not through organizations (even churches) in themselves.

Let us seek the Lord earnestly on this matter. May He lead us to a right relationship to Christ Jesus and to each other.

Re: - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2006/4/19 21:43

Naci,

Amen, and well said. John 4:23 Jesus gives us the method of fellowship.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.

When we find this place of worship, then we find real "church". One true worshipper at a time.

His Blessings,

pastorfrin

Re: Early Church Service vs American Church Service, on: 2006/4/21 16:43

The prophetic the world over mourns this one! Its not only in America, but all over! In my opinion, the whole structure of the church needs repair if not revolution! Christ is "The head" of the Church, not any Apostle, Prophet, Pastor, or Teacher. There is a problem with control. We need to mature, let go of fear, respect God, and let Him have His way! It would be alot more exciting, and look at what might happen? "Things" would happen,like tongues, prophesies, healings. The control is killing the vitality of the Holy Spirit! I sense the Jezebel spirit is the culprit! Jezebel=control, jealousy, power, fame! May Babylon fall!

Re: - posted by Onesimus4God (), on: 2006/4/22 22:40

Maybe we should learn how to "be" the Body of Chrsit, then the church thing would take care of itself!

"O"

Re: - posted by garoldr, on: 2006/4/22 23:53

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

I have good news for you. The Bride of Jesus Christ, His Church is alive and well. Indeed, the enemy has tried to prevail against the church of Jesus Christ,by deceiving and luring people with itching ears to hear a gospel or philosophy that fits their selfish desires. These churches are liken to a business where numbers and \$\$\$ are the most important thing to the board. Souls lost because the preachers don't contend for the faith and teach what Christ commanded, are not important to those preachers. One day at the judgement seat, they will have to answer for all those souls they misled to an eternal hell.

Sadly, these so called churches are led by preachers and deacons claiming to be holy, but living a sinful life. You see, if you claim to be holy and you sin, you're nothing but a holy sinner. You're a hypocrit! God is and requires true holiness (Heb 12:14). Confessing a few sins and then continuing to sin again and again doesn't make you holy. (Josh 24) God will not forgive your sin if you keep on sinning. Sitting in a church pew, on the board, being nice, etc. won't make you holy. (How to be holy is another topic for another day)

Well, out of many of these denominations, some have said there will be a super merger of churches...an ecumenical church. They forget the basic truth that the church of the Living God is not divide, but it is already "one" - but there are two divisions. They aren't liberal or conservative, Catholic or Protestant.

They are:

1. THE CHURCH militant and triumphant; The church that is still at war with Satan & SIN.
2. and the church that has laid down her weapons.

God's word says He's going to have a people without spot or wrinkle; but that is up to you. He can't do the work unless you provide the vessel. One day there is going to be a gathering under the Blessed name of Jesus Christ in the New Jerusalem. Pray fervently that you find a church that will lead you to that city. When we place our feet on the shores of glory, we will recognize we are home at last...forevermore.

Lord bless you,
Gary

Re: Early Church Service vs American Church Service - posted by Graftedbranc, on: 2006/4/26 18:20

I would suggest that the modern Church service has very little to do with the New Testament church gatherings and meetings.

Foreign to the New Testament church is the professional Pastor. There were elders and leading brothers, but no professional hired "pastor".

All the believers functioned because the ministry was carried out not by professionals but by the joints of the rich supply and the measure of each one part. All the saints functioned in the meetings. There was no program, no entertainment, etc

. but rather all the saints came to gether and the Spirit of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ as the Head was the one who officiated in the meetings.

Until Saints come out of the clergy/laity (as some have pointed out. "the doctrine of the Nicolaitans") system, lay hold on the gift of God which is within them (the Spirit of the resurrected Christ) and begin to function as members of the One body of Christ, the Lord will never have what He is after. That is, a practical manifestation, His expression in His body on this earth.

Graftedbranch