

Christianity United

One Body in Christ

Marc Carrier

“Christianity United: One Body in Christ” by Marc Carrier, Copyright © 2020 by Marc Carrier. All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 9798648101876

You may use, translate, print and publish this material, in whole or in part, without prior permission and without exclusive rights, to train and mobilize the saints for kingdom expansion, in any language, for any people group, in any country. However, reproduction of these materials, in whole or in part, for commercial purposes is prohibited.

Unless marked otherwise, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New American Standard Bible version, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked *KJV* are taken from the Holy Bible, King James Version.

Quotations marked *ANF* are taken from the Ante-Nicene Fathers Set, Philip Schaff, 1885.

Contents

Foreword.....	5
Introduction.....	7
What is the Church?	9
Purposes and Functions of the Church.....	15
The Importance of DNA	19
Making Disciples with the Right DNA	21
Church DNA: The Teachings of Jesus.....	25
Church DNA: Confirming the Teachings.....	31
Who establishes the DNA?	35
Priesthood of Believers.....	39
Leadership	45
The Practices of the Church and their Purposes	51
The Main Purpose for the Assembly	55
Intimacy and Unity.....	59
Maintaining Purity of the Body.....	63
Traditions.....	67
Our Role in the Church.....	71
Epilogue	75
About Wajumbe Training Center	77

Foreword

Marc Carrier has done it again!

In his new book, *Christianity United: One Body in Christ*, Marc has, once again, not written simply his theory, his advice, or his theology on the subject of unity. Instead, he documents his journey through hardship, trials, and the special challenges of cross-cultural missions, to establish a number of churches that have actually *arrived* at unity. His many churches now possess something that few single congregations have, or even understand: corporate unity. As usual, Marc has experientially achieved and accomplished something himself before he shares it with us.

I met Marc when I found his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, on the Scroll Publishing website (in my own journey to understand and articulate the Kingdom of God). I emailed the address on the back of the book and so began my journey with Marc. I have walked with Marc for nine years now and benefited from his mentorship. I consider myself a disciple, blessed to have a leader who shares insights such as I've found in *Christianity United*.

Beginning the book with the biblical definition of the church and its intended functions, Marc explains the importance of the DNA of both the disciple and the body: the foundation upon which to build. The topic of leadership and the purposes of the actual assembly are a new look at the biblical model of the church gathering and how to apply it in our churches today. These are vital truths about issues crippling the church in the West. Our splintered and divisive state undermines our ability to effectively engage the world around us. Marc gives us the insight and practical tools to remedy this tragic situation.

This is an important work that continues the narrative of Marc's journey in following Jesus, making disciples, and planting effective churches. As a matter of fact, the scope of his literary work has come to be something unique in all of Christianity. To me, this series of books is like none other. *Pioneering the Kingdom* explained how to actually make biblically-based disciples using the practical methods and principles of our Lord Jesus, as successfully applied in the field by Marc. Our modern teachings in the West do little more than pay lip service to discipleship; what we are doing is not working. On the other hand, Marc applies the biblical model in a cross-cultural context with amazing success. He actually has disciples who make disciples. You can, too; he shows you how.

Christianity Unleashed, which caused such a stir in the West, is an amazing narrative and insightful book, sharing the journey Marc and his wife Cindy have taken in an area of Africa where witchcraft, curses and demons are seemingly woven into the fabric of the culture. It is a book, again, that is proven in the field and shows the reader how to engage in spiritual warfare and the work of God. *Christianity Advanced* clearly and practically teaches on the spiritual gifts, Marc's personal journey in their discovery and use, and their actual application in his many house churches in East Africa. And this, his latest book, is an excellent continuation in this series, for without unity we cannot stand. As a kingdom divided we are doomed to ineffectiveness and perhaps worse.

Marc ends *Christianity Unity* with a surprising invitation: for you, the reader, to actually join him in the field and apply the principles and hands-on practices found in all these amazing resources. I never saw that coming! This is your opportunity to step out of the books and into reality, empowered and equipped. I am not aware of anyone, much less a multigenerational disciple maker, who has ever offered to personally engage with those outside of his current ministry to join in the work together. But perhaps we *should* have seen it coming—the book is about unity, after all. What better way to move forward than in unity of spirit and purpose? This is an opportunity to establish our personal and corporate DNA and do just that.

Christianity United

M. Glenn Roseberry, Jr.
Missionary to Tanzania, Africa

Introduction

²⁰“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³ I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:20-23)

Christ’s final prayer the night before His crucifixion was that His followers, and those who believed in Him through their testimony, would be united. He asked the Father for this three times as His dying wish. His church, His bride, all Christians everywhere: perfected in unity. That was the final thought on Jesus’ mind as He knew He would be imminently departing the world.

Christianity United is the next in a series of books testifying to my experiences as a foreign missionary. The objective of this book is to provide a model for church planting and development that is biblical, practical, effective, sustainable, and reproducible, regardless of cultural context or available resources. However, this is not simply another church planting book. This book offers church development ideas and practices that should result in a united body: one in mind, love, spirit, purpose, and humility (see Philippians 2:1-5). As the book unfolds, I will unwrap the significance of each aspect of unity and how they work together to develop a beautiful bride worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have been serving as a missionary in Kenya for eight years now. When I arrived with my family, we did not know anyone here. We did not know the language. We were not familiar with the culture. From those humble beginnings we now have numerous churches with hundreds of disciples over a large geographic area. However, this alone is not that special. What makes our mission unique is that it is united: in belief, practice, purpose, spirit, love, and humility. We are one mission. That is not to say we have not and do not encounter challenges and difficulties; we certainly do. However, we understand and anticipate trials and manage them in such a way that every hurdle we overcome makes us stronger and even more united. It is my hope that this book will help others become powerful and effective mission machines in their own locales.

This book will likely not be as exciting as some of my other writings, in that it is largely informational. It is designed to complement *Pioneering the Kingdom*, *Christianity Unleashed*, and *Christianity Advanced*, which all (in their own way) apply to the enterprise of church planting and development. I will often refer back to those volumes to avoid duplicating content already written. However, this book is designed to fill in some of the gaps left by the others, as I regularly receive many questions and solicitations for advice concerning church matters from international brethren. My goal is for this to be a single, easily-referenced volume of bible references, information, and practical suggestions.

My testimony will focus on the apostolic or early church (biblical) model for church planting and development. Here in Kenya, we have been afforded the rare opportunity to reduce our beliefs and practices to the very essentials as specified or demonstrated in the scriptures. In so doing, we do not share many of the traditions that most people today associate with church, or even with Christianity. As I emphasize the importance and power of simplicity, I will try to demonstrate the inherent value of minimizing worldly traditions in lieu of biblical practices. However, some aspects of church cannot be overlooked or neglected; those essentials must not be usurped by man-made practices and traditions.

What is the Church?

Local manifestations of the bride of Christ range from authoritarian hegemonies, to entertaining social clubs, to leaderless home meetings. All of these are poor substitutes for the true, healthy, and holy bride of Christ. Churches should be operating as evangelistic machines, united in belief, practice, purpose, spirit, love, and humility. Some people may be offended at the idea of comparing the church to a machine. However, the definition of a machine is *an apparatus consisting of interrelated parts with separate functions, used in a performance of some kind of work*. The church is supposed to be a machine. And if it is not, something is wrong.

However, the church is not *just* a machine, or an inanimate object. It is truly an organism. Here is the first definition of the word *organism* from Dictionary.com: *a form of life composed of mutually interdependent parts that maintain various vital processes*. And another: *any complex thing or system having properties and functions determined not only by the properties and relations of its individual parts, but by the character of the whole that they compose and by the relations of the parts to the whole*.

An attribute associated with organisms that is not shared with machines is *life*. Life is defined as *the sum of the distinguishing phenomena of organisms, especially metabolism, growth, reproduction, and adaptation to environment*. Metabolism is defined as *any basic process of organic functioning or operating*, or in other words, utilizing inputs to produce specified outputs.

A church is not simply an organization or an inanimate object. Based on the definition of life itself, church is a living organism with spiritual inputs designed to produce spiritual outputs. The church is meant to grow, reproduce, and adapt to its environment within the constraints of its specified purpose and objectives. A church without spiritual inputs (the gifts of the Holy Spirit, for example), will not produce spiritual outputs (fruitfulness). And a church that does not reproduce will simply extinguish after one generation. Anything not growing is dying; therefore, a church that is not growing is a church that is dying.

Interestingly, Jesus spoke sparingly concerning the church, with only two mentions:

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19).

His church would be built on this foundation and would overcome by virtue of vested authority. The only other mention of the church by Jesus concerns correcting a wayward brother; if the brother refused to be corrected by brethren, the case was to be brought to the church for deliberation:

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” (Matthew 18:17-20)

This passage highlights the complete authority of the church as a body. Jesus also emphasizes His real presence among the gathered saints, and the very basis of what constitutes church: where two or three gather in His name. Because of Jesus’ relative silence on the subject of church, if we want to fully understand the nature of the church we need to leave the gospels and explore the epistles.

With reference to the church, the epistles often cite the imagery of the Old Testament paradigm of Israel and the temple system. However, many make the mistake of using the Old Testament system as a direct analogy rather than simply a spiritual type. This was not always misunderstood. In the apostolic church (the church founded by the apostles) and the Ante-Nicene church (the church prior to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD), the church still upheld the original, intended understanding:

⁴And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵you 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. ⁶For *this* is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ⁷This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,” ⁸ and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. ⁹But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God’s* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (1 Peter 2:4-9)

Here Peter compares many aspects of the Old Covenant priestly system to the New Covenant church. The spiritual house, the temple building made of stones, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the chosen people of God (Israel), are all here represented as types of a new paradigm under the New Covenant, in which the church supplants all that preceded it. Today the church is the chosen race; the church is the temple (or sanctuary); the church is the acceptable sacrifices; the church is the holy priesthood. I will explain each of these points specifically later. But before I do, I want to highlight another important point in this passage.

The church is defined by what it is. However, it is also identified by what it is *not*, or rather, what it once was. Peter addresses those “called out of darkness” into Christ’s marvelous light. The church is therefore made up of those who used to be in darkness but are now walking in light. This fact is hidden within the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*.

Ekklesia is a compound of the word *ek*, which is a preposition denoting origin (e.g. out of, from, by, away from) and *kaleo*, which means to call, invite, or summon. Thus, *ekklesia* is best described as being called out, summoned from, or invited away from. The common definition in the natural (non-Christian) sense is a gathering of called out citizens, or *an assembly*; this is understood from Acts 19:32, 39, and 41. The word translated *congregation* is used in reference to the Israelites in Acts 7:38. Both examples refer to groups of people that are distinct from others.

In the Christian sense, however, the word *ekklesia* is always translated *church*. Culturally today, *church* nearly always references a building, organization, or institution. Yet the truest sense of the word refers to a group of people, not just the place where the people meet. In the passage from First Peter above, we can see both what people were called from (darkness), and what they were assembled into (Christ’s marvelous light).

Another passage that describes the process of being called out is Colossians 1:13-14, “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Once rescued (or called out from) darkness, we become citizens of Christ’s kingdom through the forgiveness of our sins. This was the gospel given to Paul by Jesus Himself (see Galatians 1:11-12) on the road to Damascus:

I am sending you, ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’ (Acts 26:17b-19)

Therefore, the gospel of the kingdom (see Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14, Luke 16:16) was this: that sinners are being called out of the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of Christ through the forgiveness of sins, thus becoming the sons of light, a part of His church.

Ekklesia requires context to understand the scale of the assembly of called-out people; it can be small, large, plural, or universal. Yet every example refers to an assembly of people called out of darkness. When Christ was speaking of church in Matthew 16:18, He was referring to the universal church (see also Ephesians 5:23-32, Colossians 1:18). However, when He mentioned church discipline in Matthew 18:17, He certainly had local assemblies in mind.

Occasionally Scripture speaks of churches in particular cities or towns, such as the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31), Caesarea (Acts 18:22), Ephesus (Acts 20:17), Cenchræa (Romans 16:1), Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1), Laodicea (Colossians 4:16), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 Thessalonians 1:1), the church throughout all Judea, and the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:4, 11). In every one of these examples, the writers are referring to specific groups in named cities or towns. But the church is still the people, not the place: those (in a particular geographic area) who have been called out of darkness.

Paul often referred to local assemblies that exclusively met in the private homes of disciples: “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house” (Colossians 4:15). Also,

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also *greet* the church that is in their house. (Romans 16:3-5a)

¹Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, ²and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house. (Philemon 1:1-2)

¹⁹The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. (1 Corinthians 16:19)

All of these examples speak of the group or assembly of called out people that meets at a particular private home. Note that the home, or the place where they meet, is not the church. Rather, the *people* are the church and they meet *in the homes*.

In First Corinthians 16:19 (cited above), Paul acknowledges a plurality of churches—numerous local assemblies of called out people that meet at different private homes, but who all live in a particular region, rather than just one city or town. This is true also of churches in Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), churches of the Gentiles (Romans 16:4), churches of Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1), churches of Asia (1 Corinthians 16:19), churches of Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1), and the churches of Judea (Galatians 1:22).

Yet even here, the writers are referring to the assemblies of people called out of darkness and transferred to Christ’s kingdom. Therefore, without exception, the word *ekklesia* (which is translated *church*) always refers to an assembly of people called out of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of Christ. The

church is people—a group of people in a particular location: a house, a town or city, a region, or the entire world (i.e., the universal church, or the bride of Christ).

Without exception, the local churches documented in the bible exclusively met in private homes. Evangelism occurred outside of homes, such as in the temple (Acts 2:46, 5:20-21). However, the unique ministries of the church only occurred in private homes.

Note that the church building is not, and never was, the equivalent of the temple of the Jews. In fact, the temple itself was never even meant to be God's house. It was never meant to become an idol. Rather, it was meant to be a place where His people worshiped Him:

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).

⁶But who is able to build a house for Him, for the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain Him? So who am I, that I should build a house for Him, except to burn *incense* before Him? (2 Chronicles 2:6)

⁴⁷ But it was Solomon who built a house for Him. ⁴⁸ However, the Most High does not dwell in *houses* made by *human* hands; as the prophet says: ⁴⁹ ‘HEAVEN IS MY THRONE, AND EARTH IS THE FOOTSTOOL OF MY FEET; WHAT KIND OF HOUSE WILL YOU BUILD FOR ME?’ says the Lord, ‘OR WHAT PLACE IS THERE FOR MY REPOSE?’ ⁵⁰ ‘WAS IT NOT MY HAND WHICH MADE ALL THESE THINGS?’ (Acts 7:47-50, see Isaiah 66:1)

Jesus first introduced the revolutionary concept that God was not constrained to a specific place of worship:

“Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you *people* say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:19-24)

The emphasis is on the worshiper and the One worshiped, and not the place of worship. And then Jesus introduced the even more radical concept of the body being the temple of God: God among us, and even God within us:

¹⁸The Jews then said to Him, “What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken. (John 2:18-22)

It was not until after Jesus' death and resurrection that the saints came to understand the profound revelation that God not only desired to *be* among us, but to live *within* us:

²⁰ Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; ²¹ nor will they say, ‘Look, here *it is!*’ or, ‘There *it is!*’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst [within you].” (Luke 17:20-21, see also Romans 8:10, Galatians 2:20, 4:19, Ephesians 4:17, Colossians 1:27)

Upon our spiritual re-birth, we become the temple of God, the residence of His real presence:

¹⁶ Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

This explains why Peter referred to the saints as living stones, being built up into a spiritual house. We are the dwelling place of God—a residence for the Spirit of God, because true worshippers don't worship on the mountain, or in Jerusalem; rather, they worship in Spirit and in Truth.

Not only are the saints the house of God, they are also the holy priesthood (see 1 Peter 2:5) and a *royal* priesthood (1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10 and 20:6). Under the Old Covenant, the priest served as a mediator between God and man, bringing offerings and performing other sacred rites to reconcile God and man. Under the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the one and only great High Priest (see the book of Hebrews) bringing the once-and-for-all sacrifice, offering Himself on the cross to reconcile man with God. Though this unique role belongs only to Jesus, we saints also perform the priestly rite of reconciling men to God as we proclaim and advance the gospel. There is no longer a special and set apart office of priest, for all saints are commanded to promulgate the great commission (making disciples of all nations). We are the priesthood of believers.

Yes, the High Priest, Jesus Christ, brought the perfect offering with the complete and final sacrifice of His own body and blood on the cross. If this is the case, what sacrifices and offerings do we (the priesthood of believers) bring? Jesus gave His life; we are to give our lives as well. However, we are to be *living* sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Our sacrifice is our devoted service (Philippians 2:17, Hebrews 13:15-16, 2 Timothy 4:6). The fruit of our service, if it endures, is our offering to God (Romans 15:16, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

So we see that the Old Testament temple and priestly system were but types of the real thing which was to come. The New Covenant was to supplant the paradigm where God was aloof and only was accessed through special people in special places on special days. Under the New Covenant, our One High Priest reconciled us to our God. He dwells among and within His people, making His abode with us, and breaking the distinction between the priestly and the laity. All of us are now priestly, serving as mediators between God and man through the gospel of our High Priest, Jesus Christ.

I want to make one last point from the First Peter passage before we move on. Peter said that the saved Gentiles have become "A CHOSEN RACE... A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION,... for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD" (1 Peter 2:9-10, portions). Throughout the Old Testament, God singled out the children of Israel; they were the people of God (see Exodus 19:3-6). However, Peter now declares that this same honor has been extended to the Gentiles—to Christians, through faith in Christ. This revolutionary teaching is peppered throughout the New Testament, and prophetically alluded to in several places in the Old Testament as well. For the sake of brevity, I will not cite them all (examples include Ephesians 3:6, Colossians 1:26-27, Romans 3:29, 9:23-26, 10:12, 11:11 and 25, Acts 11:18, 14:27, and Galatians 3:8).

In summary, the church is the people called out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light. The church is a people who were once not a people, but now are the people of God. The church is the holy and royal priesthood of all believers. The church is the holy temple of God—living stones, and a living sacrifice and spiritual offering. The church is a chosen race, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. *That* is the church, the assembly of saints.

Purposes and Functions of the Church

Earlier I spoke of the church being a *machine*, emphasizing that the various parts and functions implicit in the definition could certainly map to an understanding of the church. However, the definition of an *organism* is certainly even more pertinent to our discussion and can help us understand the purposes and functions of the church.

All living organisms share key functions such as *metabolism*, *growth*, *reproduction*, and *adaptation to environment*. When we study the scriptures to identify the functions and attributes of the church, we see that they match closely to those of a living organism. Let's start with growth and reproduction.

The Great Commission itself is an admonition towards growth and reproduction in the body. These processes should be evident in both the church (the assembly of disciples) and the disciples themselves (the building blocks of the church). The edict is simple:

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20a)

¹⁵ And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. ¹⁶ He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)

Both of these renditions of the same "Great Commission" emphasize the expansion (reproduction) of the church so that it would ultimately reach into "all the world" or "all nations." Further, Jesus' intent was the growth (maturing) of the individual disciples; baptism could be understood as a singular event, but I don't think any of us would argue that being taught to obey the commands of Jesus is a process requiring time and personal growth.

The first thing to note is the first word of the first passage: *Go*. The edict to do the work of the Great Commission is not inward-focused, towards the church or within the church. Rather, it is outward-focused, on the unsaved outside the church. This is so obvious that it should go without saying. However, some churches de-emphasize outreach altogether, while others use the church services themselves to reach the unsaved, simply "inviting them to church" and expecting that eventually there will be some kind of conversion as a result.

I think it's important to note that the Great Commission never states to make converts. Rather, the command is to make *disciples*. We are not seeking individuals who simply give an intellectual assent to the gospel or subscribe to "church membership." We are to bring people to repentance and baptism, to the complete surrender necessary to obey the teachings of Jesus. The goal should be transference from darkness to light, from the world to the kingdom, from walking in sin to walking by the Spirit.

Jesus made it obvious that the work of the Great Commission was in going "out." He told His disciples "that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon [them]; and...be [His] witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He sent them out just as the Father had sent Him (see John 20:21).

So what is the objective of our *going* or *being sent*? The end game is to make disciples. A disciple is a student or pupil. Therefore, making a disciple is bringing someone to a commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, so that they will grow as they learn and put into practice everything that He commanded.

What does it look like to make a disciple? We preach the gospel to them (the gospel of the kingdom, see my prior book *Christianity Unleashed* for a definition). As they believe and repent, they are baptized. This is how they become citizens of the kingdom of God (see John 3:5). They become living stones, the temple of God, a holy nation, a people of God's own possession, and the people of God. They become called out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light, from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved son. They become the church.

My other books offer a lot more detail on this process of discipleship, but here I simply want to emphasize one thing: although the Great Commission edicts were directly addressed to Jesus' apostles, they still apply to *all disciples*. After all, Jesus told the apostles to make new disciples, and to teach those disciples (and therefore, successive generations of disciples) to do all the things that Jesus had commanded them. This includes the Great Commission itself: going forth to all peoples everywhere, proclaiming the gospel, and baptizing those who believe and repent, and then teaching that next generation of disciples to do the same. Therefore, the Great Commission was not a command for a special people at a special time, but rather was meant for all believers for all time. The close of the Matthew passage already referenced alludes to the timeless nature of the command: "Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.... and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age*" (Matthew 28:18, 20a, emphasis added).

Jesus' authority in Heaven and earth was not just during the time of the apostles. Nor did the apostles live until the end of the age. This command was for all saints from the establishment of Jesus' authority (His death and resurrection, see Colossians 1:18, Philippians 2:8-11, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28) until the time of His return at the end of the age. That means it applies to us today, and not just to the apostles during their lifetimes.

In comparing the church to an organism, we see that disciples grow as they mature and develop; as well, adding numbers of disciples increases the size of the church. These growth processes are distinct from one another, but one should lead to the other.

With the growth of an organism, reproduction is inevitable. This process does not just involve the birthing of progeny. It also takes rearing to maturity, such that the next generation can function with autonomy. The biology of reproduction, while complex, can be viewed in simple terms: plant the seed, make a baby, and done. However, there is a big difference between a sperm donor and a parent. Although the mothers will say delivering a baby is not easy, it is far less work than decades of parenting.

It is the same with discipleship. Though evangelism can be exciting and rewarding, it is the fun and easy part. Taking those new disciples to maturity (or, as Jesus stated, teaching to observe all that He commanded) is where the rubber meets the road. That is the real work.

Just as the nuclear family is the God-ordained and prescribed vehicle by which children are conceived and reared to maturity, the church is the God-ordained and prescribed vehicle by which the unsaved are re-birthed and brought to spiritual maturity. While children born out of wedlock and to single-parent households can become balanced and functional adults, it is extremely difficult and success more elusive. It is not the way God intended for it to be. The same can be said for making converts absent the spiritual family (the church). No one is supposed to be a spiritual orphan or lone ranger Christian. We are supposed to grow, mature, develop, and step into our callings within the security, guidance, and protection of the church.

Even a two-parent household does not automatically send functional and balanced adults out into the world. I once said that if you have a real trouble-maker child in your community wreaking all sorts of havoc, follow him home. You will almost assuredly find dysfunctional parents at the root of the problem.

Well, it is the same with dysfunctional churches. They may be making disciples, or pupils of teachings and behaviors, but they are not necessarily disciples *of Christ*, following His teachings and life example.

With that said, neither parents nor churches have complete control over the choices made by those under their care and charge. However, with a diligent input of care, effort, and exhortation, success in the endeavor becomes more likely. Difficulties should be anticipated, mitigated, and managed. Likewise, challenges should be leveraged as teaching opportunities to further the immature on their path to maturity. As the application of growth and reproduction to biological parenting is obvious, so also can the parallel be drawn to spiritual parenting within God's church.

The Importance of DNA

The complexity of growth and reproduction should not be lost on us as we compare those biological processes to what God intends for His church. The creation of a new being in the likeness of its forebears, from conception through development, has to be one of the greatest miracles of all time. Although scientists and doctors can describe it, the complexities still boggle the mind and the intricate biological and biochemical processes are beyond comprehension.

The chromosomes containing the DNA of each parent combine to form a unique, single-celled organism, the zygote. That newly-combined DNA code directs the zygote, with its unique design, to start cell division again and again. As the organism continues development according to the instructions embedded in the DNA, cells begin to differentiate and specialize both in function and in location, until a complete and biologically autonomous form is birthed. The process is truly amazing. What is even more amazing is that millions of organisms reproduce successfully daily, with relatively few mistakes or failures.

However, if the DNA in the chromosomes contributed by the parents is mutated or compromised in any way, the new and unique organism will fail to develop as per the designed functions, and problems will occur. This is why healthy DNA is so important.

The DNA of a church (a local expression of the body) is established at its inception and is imparted to the individual disciples at conversion. The functions of the interrelated parts of the church are developed with the ongoing discipleship of the disciples. So who are the progenitors of the church?

Let's look again at the passage in First Peter:

⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*," (1 Peter 2:6-7)

Jesus is the corner stone of the building we call the church. The corner stone is the principle stone, the first stone placed in a foundation that guides builders for the laying of the remainder of the foundation. It dictates where the structure will be built and its orientation.

In Ephesians 2:19-22 we read,

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

We see again here that Jesus is the corner stone and we saints are being built together, being fitted together, and growing into the building: His holy temple. However, a building will only endure if it has a firm foundation. And here we see that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

The blueprint of the church, the DNA, is Christ. He is the corner stone, the placement of the building. If the foundation is not placed rightly—on the Rock, on Christ—it will fall (see Luke 6:48-49, Romans 9:32-33). Christ is the foundation but it is the apostles and prophets who lay the foundation.

Paul wrote to the churches in Corinth,

¹⁰ According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, ¹³ each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (1 Corinthians 3:10-13)

Here again we see that the church is built with Christ as the basis. The foundation is laid by the apostle, and built upon by his successors. The quality of their work will be evident when tested by fire.

I have already stated that the Great Commission passages were directly addressed to the remaining eleven apostles (Judas had already left them), though I made the point that the commands likewise applied to successive generations of disciples. The sending is what gives the apostles their name, for *apostle* simply means *someone sent forth with orders; delegate, or messenger*. The modern word *missionary* is the English transliteration of the Latin word which likewise means *someone sent*. Therefore, *missionary* can be accurately translated *apostle*.

The universal use of the term apostle (that is, beyond the original twelve) can be seen as applied to Jesus Himself (Hebrews 3:1), Matthias (Acts 1:26), James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:19), Paul (Galatians 1:1 among others), Barnabas (1 Corinthians 9:5-6, Acts 14:4, 14), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7), Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), and Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6-9). It was not a special term only applied to the twelve.

In order to see the precedent of the Lord sending the apostle to fulfill the Great Commission, I will focus on apostles who were not part of the twelve.

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was *there*, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4)

Barnabas and Saul were not summoned by Jesus Himself and physically sent by an audible voice. Rather, a group of five prophets and teachers were fasting and praying and the Holy Spirit spoke to them, to set apart two of the brethren to send them forth for the work to which He had called them. Therefore, that work was initiated, ordained, and set in motion by the Lord, the corner stone. But the foundation was laid by the apostles (Paul and Barnabas) and prophets (the five men). The Lord spoke to the five: *prophets*. The Lord sent the two: *apostles*. Once called and sent, the apostles executed their work autonomously, only checking in with the sending church occasionally with progress reports.

It is incumbent upon the foundation builders to do as Paul did: to lay that foundation as a *wise master builder*, with Christ as the blueprint. It is the apostles and prophets who will establish the DNA, which will be the blueprint for all successive generations of disciples, and the basis for future leadership development. There can be no compromise; laxity early on will prove to be disastrous thereafter.

Making Disciples with the Right DNA

It is not my intention to repeat material already presented in my previous books (*Pioneering the Kingdom*, *Christianity Unleashed*, and *Christianity Advanced*). These books thoroughly cover Luke 10 (two-by-two) evangelism, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, healing the sick, and delivering from demons. However, I do want to emphasize the elements of these activities that are strategically important for establishing the correct DNA of a church from its very beginning.

First and foremost, prospective disciples must know what they are entering into and what they are putting behind them. They must be presented the gospel of the kingdom, differentiating the kingdom of God from the kingdom of darkness. They must understand the importance of complete and total surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ: abandoning all allegiances to Satan, sin, and the world, whilst committing to ongoing obedience to Jesus Christ. They must be taught the significance of confession, repentance, and baptism. They must submit to baptism following confession, repentance, and deliverance. If you are not intimately familiar with performing these tasks with confidence, please take a look at the relevant sections of the aforementioned books.¹

Our practices as a church here in Kenya are standardized and easily reproducible. The reason I simplified these practices was to bridge the language and knowledge gaps between myself and the disciples I was making here in Kenya. (I discuss the importance of this in prior books, so I won't belabor the point here.) For the sake of brevity, I'll just review the main points.

Our teachers and evangelists present four introductory lessons as they engage with new prospects. We actually have them printed as booklets for ease of presentation:

- 1.) *The Two Kingdoms* (a presentation of the gospel of the kingdom),
- 2.) *Surrender, Repent, be Baptized, and Receive the Holy Spirit* (includes a spiritual inventory used for confession, repentance, and deliverance),
- 3.) *The Teachings of Jesus*, and
- 4.) *What the Bible says about Church*

The premise of these field booklets is the Great Commission passages already presented: preach the gospel, believe, repent, be baptized, and teach to obey all Jesus commanded.

When I started evangelizing in the villages here in Kenya I used to teach this content with prospects just using my bible. But when it came time to send the next generation into the field evangelizing, they lacked the necessary familiarity with the bible to exclusively rely on memory. Thus, I organized the basic teachings into booklets. The added benefit is that when we are done teaching new prospects, we are able to leave the booklets with them for future reference, to give them time to digest the materials and decide if they want to become disciples of Christ. Since many villagers don't own bibles, having a printed resource with vital scriptures is helpful.

As per Matthew 28:19-20, we used to preach in a slightly different order than now. We taught the kingdom using book one; book two takes prospects through surrender, repentance, and baptism, including a spiritual inventory that guides confession, repentance, and deliverance. We then baptized after book 2. Following candidates' baptism, we taught the commands of Christ using book three, and followed up with the church booklet (book 4). This order was adopted because it seemed most consistent with scripture. However, after many years we have found that some "join us" only to find that they disagree with

¹ All of these books are available for free in .PDF at www.livethebible.info.

foundational doctrines and practices when presented books 3 and 4 following baptism. Unfortunately, this sometimes ended with them leaving our church. Therefore, now we only baptize after teaching all four foundational books.

Though our practices patterned what is seen in scripture, we now recognize that our ministry environment is vastly different from that of the first church. The apostles were ministering to non-believers who were not yet acquainted with Christianity. We, on the other hand, are ministering in a post-Christian environment, where more than 80 percent of the population ascribes to some form of Christianity. The historic (apostolic and early church) biblical doctrines and practices are typically foreign to the Christian population here. And truth be told, the “brands” of denominational Christianity in most Christian-majority countries are vastly different than the historic faith in both doctrine and practice.

And it is here that I must state the obvious: if you, the reader, subscribe to one of the major “brands” out there, this book will likely have little relevance and offer little utility for you. This book is designed to establish DNA that is both sustainable and reproducible, which demands simplicity. If “branded” or denominational DNA is imparted, this will require indoctrination, likely through theological institutions and years of study. This is why the clergy-laity distinction exists in nearly all denominations. To be qualified to lead in an institution, you must conform to the mold pre-determined by that institution.

However, the biblical model of discipleship is to allow scriptures to speak for themselves. Therefore, when the disciple is taught “to observe all that I [Jesus] have commanded you,” it does not necessarily mean to tell the new disciple exactly what to believe. Rather it means to teach the disciple to accept what Jesus taught at face value, and obey it. This is a radical concept. However, it’s one that has historical precedent. We will come back to this later.

In establishing the right DNA for a church, prospective disciples need to know what they are joining. The standards by which you operate need to be articulated, testable, and open to reasonable scrutiny. The standards need to be above, independent of, and separate from those enforcing them (similar to secular governance by rule of law). This is vital to mitigate and even avoid bias. In this paradigm, prospects undergoing teaching for membership have a choice: subscribe to the premise and foundation offered in the fellowship, or go elsewhere. This is vitally important for maintaining unity in the body.

All prospective members need to come in the same door, by the same method. Whether someone is a professed Christian of twenty years or a completely unsaved sinner, every prospect must undergo the same teachings to lay the same exact foundation. Never assume anything. Because of the huge diversity of Christian belief and practice, two professing Christians may have two very divergent belief systems. And truthfully, the “churched” bring far more risk of introducing disunity to the church than unbelievers do. This is because they carry with them all their historic beliefs and practices, all their indoctrination and presuppositions. Churched prospects require more teaching and careful scrutiny than do nonbelievers, by far. Beware of this fact.

The supposedly spiritually strong (as attractive as they may be to a young church) are very difficult to persuade towards simplicity if they subscribe to theology derived from intellectualism. And those who suppose themselves knowledgeable are subject to pride and are prone to bringing confusion through public disagreements. The goal is the humble-hearted—the soil of the “good and honest heart.” That does not mean we’re looking for the ignorant or push-overs; it means people coming in will ideally be teachable and persuadable.

As such, when local churches are established or expanding, those whose personal beliefs and practices are contrary to the premise and foundation established by the local church are, quite simply, free to go elsewhere. It is best not to welcome people with a spirit of disunity.

When I say join, accept, or become a member, I specifically refer to being accepted into communion, or partaking in the Lord's Table. John 3:5 says we must be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Romans 6:1-11 says we die with Christ and rise with Him in baptism. Peter answered the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2:38) that they must repent, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and receive the Holy Spirit. Colossians 2:11-12 says baptism is the "rite of passage" in the New Covenant as contrasted with circumcision in the Old Covenant. Prospects enter the kingdom of God, become citizens of the kingdom, are grafted into the Vine, and become part of the body of Christ (in communion with Christ and one another) upon repentance, baptism, and being born again. This is the historic understanding.

We teach books one and two before baptism; this occasionally takes time. Therefore, our practice is to welcome visitors to our Sunday services for a short time, if they at some point expect to go through teachings. However, they are not welcome to partake in the Lord's Table until they have been baptized and gone through all four foundational teaching booklets. Even if they were baptized before joining us, they still must be taught and agree to the premise and foundation of the fellowship. Their prior conversion will be assessed; together we and they will determine if they were baptized satisfactorily (upon repentance) in their prior church. Our mission accepts those baptized by full immersion at an age of mental and emotional maturity upon repentance, if there is no evidence of having been "backslidden" since conversion. If a prospective member confesses to having walked in a sinful state, we recommend re-baptism.

Since I keep referring to prospective disciples becoming members based on agreement with the church's premise and foundation, I recognize that you, the reader, may have difficulty understanding what I mean. It likely looks to the casual reader that our ministry is a cult because it subscribes to a strict brand of teachings with zero tolerance for dissent. This is actually far from the truth. The foundation (Christ) is non-negotiable. However, the teachings and doctrines themselves are subject to scrutiny. They must be, for the truth is the truth, but fallible man is not immune to coming to different conclusions even when referring to the infallible scriptures. So in the next chapter, we'll take a look at the apostolic (or early church) example, which I personally believe is indispensable for establishing the DNA for a sustainable and reproducible church—a living organism, a "mission machine."

Church DNA: The Teachings of Jesus

The church of Acts and the Ante-Nicene church both spanned an enormous geographic region, with multiple languages and cultures. However, the church was one: completely united in belief and practice. They were likewise united in purpose, spirit, love, in humility. In contrast, today we have tens of thousands of denominations reading the same bible, yet coming to vastly divergent conclusions on belief and practice. This only leads to division and discord.

The obvious discrepancy between the early and modern-day church stems from that fact that we Christians today have largely adopted a vastly different premise and foundation than the early church—we have completely different DNA. Today we are an organization rather than an organism. Complex theology trumps simplicity. We are oriented toward meetings, not mission. The result? Ineffective ministries that are neither sustainable nor reproducible without a vast input of resources. And true unity is often elusive.

In this chapter I want to share the premise and foundation of the primitive church, the same paradigm we have adopted and put into practice in our mission in East Africa. This model will prove foreign to any Christians unfamiliar with the early church understanding of scripture. However, starting with the right DNA, such as we see in the early church, is one of the most powerful secrets to establishing a church that is united, effective, sustainable, and reproducible.

Christ is the Head of the church. God reveals Christ and His will for the church through His Word, the bible. God also speaks to His people through direct revelation (the various gifts of the Holy Spirit). The revelatory gifts can provide timely direction or deeper insights, but will never conflict with the timeless written Word. Therefore, practically speaking, the Word of God reigns supreme as pertaining to the church. No human being or revelation of God will supersede or usurp the Word of God, period.

The primitive church accepted the Scriptures at face value with the most straightforward, literal interpretations presented by the text, while reconciling the balance of scripture. The premise here is simplicity over intellectualizing the Word. This is not to say that the scriptures do not contain symbolism, metaphors, and hyperbole. It's just to say it is not acceptable to interpret challenging passages as figurative simply because we are not comfortable with the ramifications of literal obedience. We must simply accept the most straightforward and honest interpretation of the meaning and intent of the scriptures. Jesus once said,

“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:3-4)

The apostle Paul wrote,

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.” ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

¹⁸ Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*”; ²⁰ and again, “*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.*” (1 Corinthians 3:18-20)

The take-away is that God has spoken through His Word, and we must humble ourselves and submit to it. This does not mean surrendering our brains at the door of the church, it means surrendering our will at the foot of the cross. Let’s accept that God meant what He said and said what He meant. Let’s acknowledge that His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, even on things that are difficult. But that does not mean we accept clear contradictions or hold to beliefs that have no basis or relevance in reality. Faith is trusting and believing in the unseen on the basis of what has been seen. The message of the cross and the historicity of the resurrection are sufficient to trust in the teachings of Jesus and the writings of His followers.

Accepting the Word in its simplicity is necessary in establishing the right DNA for the church. Why? Because nearly all will agree with the statement that “Jesus is the head of the church.” However, most will *not* agree that Jesus was meant to be obeyed—maybe in theory, but not always in practice. A church that lives out the teachings of Jesus demonstrates the veracity of the things written, which are the foundation of our faith. We believe and obey. God shows up and validates and verifies.

Here I want to testify about how we established the DNA of our mission, and the biblical basis for it. Our mission, like the early church, subscribes to literal obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and to the supremacy of the teachings of Christ. They viewed all of the apostolic teachings (epistles) as supportive of the teachings of Christ—never contradictory, and certainly not superseding His teachings. Let’s quickly unpack some passages to support this view:

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Here, at the culmination of the revolutionary teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew Chapters 5, 6, and 7), Jesus summarizes it all by telling his disciples that those who hear and act on His teachings will stand, while those who ignore them will fall. I am well aware that many spiritualize these teachings, or theologize them into obsolescence by saying they don’t apply today. However, the early Christians accepted them quite literally, as even seen in several epistles. Note how James 4:11-12 and Romans 14:1-4 repeat Matthew 7:1-2. First Peter 3:8-9 and Romans 12:17-21 match Matthew 5:38-41. James 5:12 correlates to Matthew 5:37. Romans 7:2-3 and First Corinthians 7:10-11 and 39 line up with Matthew 5:31-32. First Timothy 6:6-11 and James 1:9-11 match Matthew 6:19-21. Maybe some of you think this last example is a stretch; however, to the early church it was not. They read and understood the epistles in context of the teachings of Christ, and with that premise in mind. Therefore, the scriptures offered no contradictions or confusion.

Recall my earlier admonition, that it is Christ who is the corner stone. The apostles and prophets built a foundation, not of their choosing, but rather on Jesus Christ (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Ephesians 2:19-22). It was not a foundation *about* Jesus, but a foundation on His actual teachings (1 Timothy 6:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:2). The early church knew that we were not called to simply believe in Jesus, but rather to obey Him (see John 3:36, John 15:5-10, Romans 2:4-11, 1 John 2:3-6, Acts 5:32, Romans 6:16, Galatians 5:7, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Hebrews 5:9, 1 Peter 1:2, 4:17).

I offer this abundance of example passages (though there are many more) to refute the false premise that Christians are simply supposed to *believe* in Jesus, to the neglect of obedience. This doctrine is an innovation foreign to the apostolic and Ante-Nicene church. In order to subscribe to such a doctrine, one must completely disregard or theologize away Jesus' actual teachings and formulate an alternative view by accepting that the teachings in the epistles supersede the teachings of Jesus Christ, making *them* the corner stone. This is a travesty.

The reason I put so much emphasis on the supremacy of Christ and His teachings is because it is vitally important that discipleship is built on a foundation of doing what Jesus said (teaching disciples to observe all that He commanded). In order to do that, new converts must be able to read the bible, accept what it says at face value, and obey it. I am not saying that there are not challenging teachings that require correlation and reconciliation with other passages in scripture. In fact, I will go as far as to say that there are teachings that are not definitive even when looking at the whole of the bible. (We will cover what to do in those situations later.) What I am saying is that those are the exceptions.

Jesus preached to an undereducated population, in common terms. He often conflicted with the theologians of His day, saying they were blind while the simple could see (John 9:39-41). The carnal will miss it, and the spiritual will get it. The Holy Spirit is enough if we can humble ourselves and surrender to the truths that Jesus was conveying (1 John 2:26-27). If we are open-minded, teachable, and submissive regardless of where the teachings lead, we will arrive at the truth.

Without this foundation, it is impossible for new disciples to read and understand the bible on their own. To eliminate the hard teachings of Jesus, complex theologies and mental gymnastics are required. And here is where new disciples will become very confused, experiencing cognitive dissonance because of the apparent man-made contradictions, and will be neutered spiritually. They will in turn become reliant on a clergy class to enlighten them. This dependence is certainly not sustainable or reproducible, as this model requires seminaries producing an elite class of clergy to propagate their brand of "Christianity." And we wonder why the church as a whole is in decline, and not multiplying like the early church did! It's obvious: we have traded an organism for an organization, advancing our own fiefdoms rather than the kingdom of God.

It's important to note that my emphasis here on obedience is not to "the bible," but rather to the teachings of Christ. This practice is historic, not my own personal innovation. However, popular theology, such as the teaching of being "saved by faith, not by works" contradicts the imperative to obey Christ. The biblical concept of salvation by faith does not contradict this assertion, but rather the *extrapolated theology* does.

The belief that all obedience, righteousness, and holiness is somehow bad was introduced and accepted in the mainstream in the sixteenth century. (The Gnostics subscribed to this teaching prior but were considered heretical for it.) This erroneous belief comes from Paul's teachings in Romans and Galatians that we can't be saved by works of the law, but rather we are saved by grace through faith. This is true. However, Paul was specifically referring to following the Mosaic Law, not to obeying the teachings of Jesus Christ. All the New Testament authors agreed that we are no longer under the law. They viewed the law, the corner stone of the Old Covenant, as obsolete (see Hebrews 8:7-13). They addressed this matter as a church at the Jerusalem Council in Acts chapter 15. The matter was put to rest once and for all right then and there. Paul reiterated and upheld the ruling at the council in Acts 21:15-25.

I want to address those who argue towards the alternative extreme that even Gentiles are required to obey the Mosaic Law (per Matthew 5:17-19). Note in the passages cited above (Acts 15 and 21:15-25) that the releasing of obligation to comply with the Law was for the Gentiles, not the Jews. Judaizers strictly

uphold this teaching of Jesus (which I agree is noble intent); however, they are forced to completely ignore the preponderance of evidence provided in the balance of the New Testament, which is equally inspired and authoritative. The whole of scripture must reconcile for an interpretation to be valid.

So let's review the ground rules covered so far. The teachings of Jesus are supreme. The Law of Moses is obsolete, unless taught by Jesus. (Jesus, in fact, taught nine of the ten commandments; nowhere did He teach observance of the Sabbath—therefore, Sabbath observance is not required.) All the New Testament teachings are equally inspired and authoritative. However, the presupposition is that they reaffirm what Jesus taught, and should never be understood in a way that contradicts or supersedes the teachings of Christ.

Jesus said,

¹⁵ “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments...²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”... “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.”²⁴ He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. (John 14:15-24 portions)

If you were still undecided on the matter of obedience to the commandments of Jesus Christ, I hope this excerpt puts that debate to rest. Jesus gave commandments and expected those who love Him to keep them. This is absolutely clear to any casual reader. If I lost you at this point, there is little reason to go further. Without this foundation, all is futile. Now let us move on to the next level.

The passage above refers specifically and exclusively to the commands of Jesus. However, Jesus taught more in parables and other styles than He did in issuing commands. The teachings of Christ were not written in legalese, in enumerated lists of dos and don'ts. Yet His teachings were not without intent. Jesus stated that He taught exactly what the Father told Him to teach: nothing extra, and nothing omitted (see John 12:49). Therefore, every word had a specific meaning and a specific intent.

Jesus articulated His expectations in a passage we've already looked at, but it bears repeating:

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock... Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. (Matthew 7:24, 26)

If you recall, this was how Jesus wrapped up His revolutionary teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. However, note He does *not* say “everyone who hears and obeys my *commandments* builds on the rock.” Instead, He says “everyone who hears *these words* and acts on them.” Therefore, this admonition is not to obey Jesus' commands; instead, it implores us to act upon His words.

This fact highlights the living nature of God's Word. It is not superficial and one dimensional. Let's face it, the bible is God's play book of His complete counsel concerning His interaction with humanity in the cosmic battle with His enemies. Satan sees it, too. However, Satan can see it yet not understand it, similar to when the Jewish rulers completely missed Jesus. They had the prophecies. They heard Jesus preach. But they could not understand it.

¹⁰ As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables.

¹¹ And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,¹² so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN.” (Mark 4:10-12)

¹⁰ For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who among men knows the *thoughts* of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the *thoughts* of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, ¹³ which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. ¹⁵ But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. ¹⁶ For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:10-16)

Absent the Spirit of God, the teachings of Jesus are unfathomable. Yet many who do understand the deeper mysteries suppress the obvious meaning if it conflicts with their lusts and wants. They formulate or adopt theologies that permit them to pick and choose which scriptures they must obey, and which to ignore. If that is you, I urge you to reconsider and repent. But for you who have been indoctrinated into an understanding contrary to the natural (i.e. intended *spiritual*) understanding of the Word, likewise, reevaluate your allegiance. Do you submit to a belief system or practice with human origin, or do you submit to the original natural and spiritual intent of the Word of God?

Here is how we teach our people to read the Word:

- Step 1) Read the passage.
- Step 2) Determine the natural and most straightforward meaning.
- Step 3) Identify the intent of the passage. Why did the speaker or writer say/write the passage? What was their intent? What does God want you to do with the information?
- Step 4) Do it!

This is how we “act upon” His words. James said it this way:

²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. (James 1:22)

¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

Let me provide a simple example of acting upon the teachings of Jesus, or as James said, being a doer of the Word or doing the right thing we know to do. Matthew 5:7 says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

What is the command in this passage? It’s a trick question; there is no command! Jesus does not say “be merciful” or “don’t do this or that.” It’s a statement, not a command. However, He said it for a reason. It was not just poetic language. He had a very specific intent that has direct application to our lives. So now let us evaluate the passage based on the steps I provided above.

- Step 1) Read it.
- Step 2) Determine the most straightforward meaning. For example: those who show mercy towards other people will be blessed by God with mercy.
- Step 3) What is the intent? God wants us to show mercy to others, and He will reciprocate mercy to us.
- Step 4). Do it! Show others mercy when you are wronged or mistreated, and you will be blessed with mercy from God.

Jesus could have written a list of dos and don'ts in legalese. However, He wants us to receive these deep spiritual truths internally: in our minds, in our hearts, by our spirit. It's not a list of rules for a reason. We are not saved *by* obedience. We were saved *for* obedience (Ephesians 2:10, Titus 2:14). He wants us to want to obey. Not out of fear, but rather out of love, desire, and commitment (1 John 5:3, 1 John 4:18-19).

New disciples must be given this foundation. With it, they can seek and find the heart of God and walk in the center of His will. They will be empowered to hear from God directly by the Holy Spirit. They will not be reliant on special doctrines from special people.

As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him. (1 John 2:27)

We have covered a lot of ground concerning establishing the right DNA with new disciples. We have just scratched the surface—there is still much more to address.

Church DNA: Confirming the Teachings

Establishing the right DNA is critical to the foundation of the church. What we've seen so far is that Christ is the cornerstone, the head of the church, and He expects us to act upon His teachings. The Old Covenant no longer applies to us, except where Jesus confirms it. The teachings of Jesus are of utmost importance, and we can expect that other New Testament authors will not contradict Jesus' words. Let us now move on to more aspects of establishing the right DNA for an effective, sustainable, and reproducible mission.

We talked about reading the Word in its simplicity; if Christ is the cornerstone of the church, we should give the greatest authority to his commands and teachings, followed by those found in the apostolic writings. Where the apostles cover materials that Jesus didn't, the apostolic teachings then rest on their own uncontested authority.

Truthfully, the different teachings should never conflict. I suggest this order only to settle *apparent* conflicts. Thus we have a framework by which we can better evaluate and research *apparent* contradictions. I will provide an example later. But first, we need to address another valuable source of counsel, the *practices* of Jesus and the apostles.

Some things Jesus and the apostles never commanded. However, the scriptures record that they did them. For example, neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded disciples to plant churches. However, it is recorded in the book of Acts and discussed in the epistles that Paul did so. The planting of churches was a direct result of Jesus' command: to go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them. As disciples were baptized and taught, they gathered and formed churches. Church planting, then, is not a command but rather a practice.

We likewise see that churches met exclusively in private homes. However, this was a practice, not a command. Therefore, when I refer to a biblical practice, I am specifically defining it as something Jesus and the apostles did, in the absence of an explicit command.

Following the practices of Jesus and the apostles is not obligatory. However, it is certainly permissible and even commendable. There is no legitimate justification for any such practices to be forbidden. The bible says that the one who says he abides in [Jesus] ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (1 John 2:6).

In his letters to the churches, Paul writes, "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us" (Philippians 3:17) and, "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

These passages make it clear that we are to strive to walk in the manner of Christ and the apostles. There can be no prohibition from doing the very same things we see they did as documented in the scriptures. However, their practices are not held to the same standard as their commands—practices are subordinate. This can become important in settling apparent contradictions in scripture.

By way of example, let us read two passages that present an apparent contradiction and apply these rules to see if it can be resolved:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)

Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

One passage above references baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, while the other references baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ. So which is correct? First and foremost, one is from Jesus and one from Peter. According to the guidance I presented above, the dispute should be settled right there. Jesus trumps Peter, period. Yet we have two more methods we can leverage to settle this seeming contradiction.

The Matthew passage is a clear and direct command to the apostles, which they are also commanded to teach all successive generations of disciples to obey. The Acts passage is a historic narrative written by Luke, describing what Peter said to the Jews wanting to repent. The narrative is in the form of a command to the intended audience, but it is narrative nonetheless. Therefore, even if we are to assume Luke is describing exactly how Peter baptized the repentant Jews (that he uttered, “in the name of Jesus Christ”) this would still only qualify as a practice at best. Therefore, at odds here, we have a command of Jesus versus a practice of Peter, again, assuming at face value that Luke is describing the baptismal formula Peter used. Therefore, Jesus trumps Peter, and command trumps practice.

But there is still another source of information that can be utilized to settle this apparent contradiction. When we leverage this important resource, the Ante-Nicene witness, we shed light that helps settle any questions.

The Ante-Nicene period spans the time between the apostolic (New Testament) church and the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Why do their insight and witness have value for us today? The apostles themselves were eyewitnesses of Jesus and could directly attest to His teachings and practices. They walked with Him, talked with Him, and were able to seek counsel from Him when needed. However, Jesus was not with them during the birth and establishment of the church; it really all started at Pentecost, and expanded from there. The apostles and their contemporaries documented the earliest period of church development for us in the New Testament. We are blessed with the witness of the apostles to learn Jesus.

Even though all our modern churches read the same bible (with small deviations in translations), we come to a remarkable number of different conclusions as to the meaning. As a result, today we have thousands of denominations with various beliefs and practices. In contrast, the church in the Ante-Nicene period spanned a huge geographical region, numerous cultures, and hundreds of years, yet had unity and uniformity in belief and practice. They clearly had something that we lack. The strength of the Ante-Nicene church arose from the fact that many of these people were direct disciples of the actual apostles or not far removed. In fact, several of the Ante-Nicene writers are actually mentioned in the New Testament.

Some of us might be familiar with the game “telephone,” where people sit in a circle and one-by-one privately whisper a message in their neighbor’s ear around the circle. The final person says the message out loud to see how close it was to the original. What typically makes the game so entertaining is how far off the final phrase is from how it started out. More players participating increase the likelihood of a significant error. Truth be told, the same scenario plays out with the evolution of theology, as we get farther removed from Christ Himself. The closer the disciple is to Jesus, the greater the likelihood of accurately presenting the original teaching.

I am in no way suggesting that the writings of the Ante-Nicene disciples are on par with the scriptures, which are inspired and alone authoritative. What I *am* suggesting is that these writings can serve as a guide to assist us in understanding the original intent of the scriptures. The authors of the Ante-Nicene writings were fluent in the Greek of the New Testament, were familiar with the culture, and were just one

or a few generations removed from Jesus and the apostles. Their insight can prove very valuable in settling those *apparent* contradictions which remain in spite of having the scriptures to read for ourselves.

So let's revisit our example about the formula for baptism: Trinitarian, or in the name of Jesus only? Since I subscribe to and adopt the methods articulated above, I accept that the formula is Trinitarian because Jesus commanded it; Jesus trumps the apostles and a command trumps practice. However, for those not settled by these proofs, the Ante-Nicene writings can offer more evidence for consideration.

The Ante-Nicene church throughout the reached world unanimously baptized by the Trinitarian formula; in fact, they baptized by triple immersion, with numerous references to this practice. The reason they did is simple: Jesus commanded it. The Ante-Nicene church writings are not used to authoritatively establish doctrine. Rather, the writings shed light on and support what the scriptures already say but that which we may not clearly understand. They bring clarity and confidence that we are approaching the scriptures in a proper way.

On this subject of baptism, the Ante-Nicene writer, Cyprian, speculated that Peter said what he said because the Jews at Pentecost “boasted of having the Father,” and had the “ancient baptism of the law and Moses.” It was Christ they had denied. So Cyprian assumed that this was a unique circumstance for the Jews at Pentecost, but believed that the Trinitarian formula was to be used for the Gentiles (see ANF Volume 5, 383).

An alternative explanation is found in the *Didache*. This is a very early work believed by many to be written by the apostles themselves. In Chapter 7 the authors state the manner in which new disciples were to be baptized—clearly by the Trinitarian formula. However, in Chapter 9 the authors state that someone should not participate in communion unless they have been baptized in the name of the Lord. Though the texts are separated by one chapter, these chapters are just short paragraphs with just a few sentences each. They would likely appear on the *same page!* The logical inference from the fact that the authors use both references to baptism on the same page is that the phrase “baptize in the name of the Lord” does not refer to the baptismal formula used, or the words spoken at the waters. Rather, it refers to people dying with Christ, and rising with Him, and being saved through Him. It is spoken of in short and simple terms because *the passage in question is not about baptism*. However, the formula used, or words uttered at the waters, is indeed the Trinitarian formula described in the chapter specifically discussing baptism, as per the command of Jesus Christ. The *apparent* contradiction therefore reconciles.

I provide this by way of example, to demonstrate the utility and benefit of using the Ante-Nicene writings as an additional reference point to clear up confusion or misunderstandings where the scriptures lack clarity or certainty. Again, the Ante-Nicene writings are not to be used to extend the scriptures, supplant the scriptures, or usurp the scriptures. They are there as a tool to support our understanding of the scriptures.

Truthfully, if not for all of the confusion and noise generated from centuries of man-made speculation and theology, the Ante-Nicene writings would not be necessary at all. Adopting their practices of interpreting scripture, the practices I've already shared, would always lead the reader to the same conclusions, with no exceptions that I can think of. However, our own theological backgrounds, preconceptions, and baggage impact how we read and understand the scriptures. This is where the Ante-Nicene writings can reboot our thinking and reset how we view the scriptures.

When pioneering a new mission (a church, which *should* be a mission), the work proceeds simply by evangelizing the lost and making new disciples, or reestablishing healthy DNA in Christians joining your numbers. Now that I have shared the premise and foundation of establishing healthy DNA in a fellowship, I hope you can appreciate the importance of bringing existing Christians into the church in the same exact

way you would minister to the unchurched. After all, the historic (apostolic and early church) DNA is vastly different than what most professing Christians are familiar with. Absent laying the proper foundation as folks come in the door, unity will be elusive as the ministry expands. If the DNA differs among members, there will be confusion in the fellowship, especially among brand new converts. This can be avoided, or at least mitigated, through well-established practices of teaching and discipleship. Let people decide to either accept and receive the foundation presented to them, or be welcome to choose to fellowship elsewhere. It's really that simple.

Who establishes the DNA?

Healthy DNA for the church has been established by Jesus Christ and confirmed by the apostles in the New Testament. It was validated and witnessed to by the Ante-Nicene church. The premise and foundation I have elaborated upon provide the ground rules for identifying and promulgating the DNA we derive from scripture. Without those tools, even though we all possess the same bible, we will not arrive at unity. Certainly unity of doctrine and practice, and the unity of mind, love, spirit, and purpose we read about in Philippians 2:2 will be elusive unless we share a common approach and understanding.

Today, doing real ministry with real flesh-and-blood disciples, the church foundation (like the church of Acts) is still laid by the apostles and prophets. That has not changed with time. Providing detailed evidence that apostles and prophets are still relevant today is outside the scope of this book; however, my prior book *Pioneering the Kingdom* provides more information on that subject. I have already cited many scriptures that address people outside of “the Twelve” as apostles. Biblically, there is no doubt that the role of “apostle” (like that of prophet) was recognized in the early church. Moreover, there is no biblical or historical reason to presume that the office has ceased. We have, by and large, simply renamed apostles *missionaries*.

As we saw in Acts chapter 13:1-3, God speaks to His people (through prophets) and calls and sends his missionaries (apostles) to go and make disciples, who then gather as churches. Who sends the apostle? The church does. This was my personal experience; however, Kenya was not my first mission field. The first mission God sent me on was from Connecticut to Indiana. I write this only to highlight the fact that “going” does not have to mean to a foreign country. Likewise, making disciples does not happen exclusively in these cross-cultural settings. The Great Commission is for all people, in all places, for all time. However, the calling and the sending are still important. Only God can plant His lampstand (Revelation 1:20). The church is a work of God, and not the product of human will.

For those who have read *Christianity Advanced*, you may recall I testified about God activating the gift of discerning of spirits with the gift of knowledge in both my wife, Cindy, and me. These gifts assist with deliverance and also permit us to see spiritual gifts, ministries, and effects in others (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). Since that time, we have had the privilege of ministering to hundreds of people both locally (here in Africa) and remotely (with international brethren). In that time, we have seen many dozens of people with apostolic calls all over the world. It is much more common than people think. However, the modern religious system denies and suppresses the role. The system has no need for apostles, because they do not fit neatly into the pastoral ministry mold. Though they should be the greatest asset to the kingdom, they are instead seen as a threat to the status quo. As a result, many apostles are wasting away in pews completely unaware of their role and potential. Equally tragic, some are trapped in pulpit ministry, having never been equipped and sent out to fulfill their call. I pray that this book will enlighten some, inspire others, and embolden even more to action. Apostles are truly needed, now more than ever.

The apostles and prophets have the very unique role of making a “first generation” of disciples through evangelism and discipleship. They will be the ones who pioneer the mission and establish the right DNA for the church. They are the gatekeepers and the shepherds, protecting what is good and resisting what is bad. They can lay a good foundation as a master builder like Paul, or build with wood, hay, and stubble. The early establishment of the DNA is vital.

It is important to understand that although mission pioneers possess a lot of power to carve the path towards success or failure, they are not without accountability. Remember, Jesus is the corner stone; His teachings are not negotiable, the scriptures are the authority, and the early church is a witness to the interpretation of the scriptures. The approach to understanding and interpreting the bible is settled for all

to observe. Interpretation of each individual verse or doctrine is always subject to scrutiny under the established rules of engagement. Therefore, even the apostle is subject to these guidelines. And he is subject to every command, teaching, and practice presented in the New Testament. If God sends, and the sent ones do their jobs within biblical guidelines, there is little opportunity for the ascension of a charismatic cult leader in such an environment.

One unforeseen necessity we benefited from in Kenya was the requirement for our mission to register our ministry and actually write down our mission statement and statement of faith. This unbiblical practice was necessary for me to obtain a work permit that would allow me to reside in Kenya and serve as a missionary. I had the privilege of being able to write out the Constitution of our organization from scratch, with no pressures and minimal constraints. I drafted a document that met the government requirements while, as best as possible, mapping to my understanding of the scriptures.

Though I did include some actual doctrines in our statement of faith, I tried instead to emphasize the concepts already presented (how to read the bible, the commands and teachings of Jesus superseding those of the apostles, and confirming with the witness of the Ante-Nicene church). This, in my opinion, promotes the longevity and sustainability of the mission long after I am gone. All the specific doctrines I did include were easily testable by the framework already suggested. I included text on membership that was consistent with what I present in this book. Our mission statement also elaborates on church discipline and excommunication, evangelistic and church practices, and leadership qualifications and ordination. It sets policy on how funds are collected and managed (all consistent with the scriptures), with the actual verses cited. I kept it all as simple and straightforward as possible, so that it could be easily understood and applied.

After several years, having planted numerous churches, our founding document has proven very helpful in allaying concerns by government authorities and protecting the church from outsiders who try to infiltrate our ranks, dogmatically introducing their pet doctrines. The written policy of the church lays the foundation of that which is not negotiable. In this way we are able to minimize divisiveness and maintain unity. Note that this is a process; we do patiently hear people out and present the evidence of our position. We have learned that those with a good and honest heart typically join us, whereas those who are dogmatic, prideful, or completely indoctrinated with false doctrine typically go their separate ways. We have learned that it is much, much better to address this on the way *in* the door than having to deal with it as a church discipline case later.

One hallmark of developing a healthy atmosphere in your mission is top-down humility. The apostle must have a healthy balance of being strong and firm on truth, righteousness, and sin, while being humble enough to accept correction, admit personal errors, apologize when in a mistake, and be approachable. Most who do not know me closely might presume I am all business and no relationship, or un-reachable; however, those who know me personally know that this is not the case. My authority rests in what I am teaching, and not in the force of my personality.

I must admit that my first couple years in Kenya were difficult on me, and my response to challenges was not always good. I was rather beaten up, emotionally and spiritually, and struggled to keep the mission afloat with extreme opposition from within and without. In order to survive, I did take on a rather command-and-control approach. I testified in *Christianity Unleashed* about the dramatic change I experienced after repenting of my poor attitude, and God did something amazing. Things have never been the same again! The trickle-down effect has influenced all those with good and honest hearts. As a result, our mission culture changed dramatically.

With humble mission leadership, the impetus is to constantly build up, empower, equip, and grant opportunities for every disciple to achieve their greatest potential in life and ministry. Skills and gifts

possessed by leaders are taught and imparted to all brethren who seek and desire to grow. There are no big people; rather, a big God using little people to do great things.

No one uses titles in our mission. We are all brothers and sisters. Everyone knows each other's gifts by witnessing them. Calls are evident by actual, visible fruit. No one needs to tell others what they can do or what their gifts are. It's apparent for all to see. And we all glorify God, not man. This is the culture of humility that is necessary for the healthy growth of the church. This is the DNA that must be established by the one whom God sends.

Priesthood of Believers

Having just discussed the importance of the apostle in pioneering a new mission, it may seem odd now to de-emphasize that role. The fact is, however, that in the church there is not one calling or gifting that supersedes another. The church is the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:27) and Jesus is the head of the church (see Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 5:32). We merely labor with Him and let Him lead:

⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. ⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

Each individual plays a vital role. There are no special people, but rather a great God who uses all people who submit themselves and make themselves available for His service. It's His work. He gets the credit. We are simply the tools He uses. We are His body: Christ on earth, His hands and feet to accomplish His purposes. But we must never forget that He is the Head from which everything is directed.

By equipping and mobilizing all saints, the church becomes an army of ministers and accomplishes much more than a ministry that showcases only one or a few charismatic leaders, relegating the rest to the role of spectator. By recognizing Christ as the Head with ourselves as His body, we can each humbly serve in our vital roles, such that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Though the following passages are long, I want to include them in their entirety so that I can be sure to pass along their important message:

³ For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. ⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly*: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:3-8)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ¹² For even as the body is one and *yet* has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason any the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those *members* of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable,

²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has *so* composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, ²⁵ so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. ²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues. ²⁹ All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they? ³⁰ All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? ³¹ But earnestly desire the greater gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:4-31)

These passages show that our gifts, ministries, and effects are all distributed by God (by grace through faith, just like our salvation; see Romans 12:3 and 5). We receive the gifts with gratitude, knowing that they are distributed according to God's will and not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought. Just like the physical body has many parts, some seen and unseen, and all those parts are equally vital to the proper functioning of the body, so is the church. Every part serves its purpose for the greater good of the body. Every member is important. Every member has a role. No one is more valuable than another. Those with more visible roles and gifts are not greater than those serving quietly behind the scenes. All serve the Lord and each other faithfully, with fervor and commitment, in whatever capacity God has equipped them. They serve for the greater good, not for recognition, affirmation, or any worldly benefit. This is my understanding of being one spirit, in humility (Philippians 2:2-3). I believe this prevalent understanding and attitude are prerequisites for God to pour out His gifts and power on a local church. After all, the gifts were intended for the edification of the body, not for any individual.

Recall I stated the church is a machine, or an organism. The scriptures use the analogy of a body, with many different parts, each with various functions. Inasmuch as the individual parts, or members, of the body are diverse, the body as a whole is designed to exhibit base functionality. And just like in a healthy body all the functions are represented, all the functions of the church are to be represented. Just like a body with non-functional parts is considered disabled, a healthy church is not to focus on some functions to the neglect of others.

Inasmuch as all the gifts and members have equal value, some roles and gifts offer greater benefit because of their greater service to the body. For example, Paul said prophecy is a greater gift than tongues because tongues edify the individual, while prophecy ministers to the whole church (1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Paul encourages the saints to seek the greater gifts—those gifts that edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:12, 1 Corinthians 12:31a).

The apostle Paul twice highlights and even orders ministries which have a prominent role in the body:

²⁷ Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers... (1 Corinthians 12:27, 28a)

¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers... (Ephesians 4:11)

I don't believe that these ministries were set apart in this way because God values them over other ministries or gifts. I believe they are highlighted because of the vital roles they play in establishing and preserving the DNA of the church. If we continue reading the Ephesians passage cited above, we see the purpose of the roles (what we now commonly refer to as the "five-fold ministry") detailed:

¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until 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. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed

here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:12-16)

The purpose of these offices and gifts is *to equip the saints for the works of ministry*—to build up the body of Christ. These ministers are responsible for bringing the saints to maturity in Christ, with steadfastness, unity, and love. These ministries were enumerated and highlighted because of their indispensable role of building the body, so that each part may more effectively do its work for the glory of God.

Paul, an apostle and master builder, laid a foundation that others built on. He advised that the work of the subsequent builders must be conducted carefully, because their work would be tested by fire (see 1 Corinthians 3:9-15). All co-laborers in the construction of God’s building, the church, are thus under compulsion to be careful how they build; this goes for all of the “five-fold ministers.” And the church, ultimately, is to be built up not to the glory of the individuals, but rather to *do the work of service*. The equipped, mature, steadfast, united, and loving body, actively serves the Head, Christ.

Interestingly, only one of these ministries is typically prominent in the modern church system: the pastor. The other offices are far less common, and those with these gifts often serve in capacities vastly different from what we see in the early church. Though I have covered this topic in prior books, I will briefly discuss it again here, since it is directly applicable to the theme of this book.

I want to emphasize that the role of pastor is given a far more prominent and essential role in the modern church system than we see in scripture. In fact, it might come as a shock to some of you that the bible only mentions the pastor once, in Ephesians 4:11 (cited above). The lack of emphasis in scripture compared to the over-emphasis in modern ministries is starkly apparent. That is not to say that the role is not important; it’s just to note that it’s not exactly what people suppose.

In lieu of the role of pastor in scripture, we see multiple mentions of elders and overseers (bishops). Most have come to accept the idea that elders are a plurality of lay leaders under a singular pastor; the pastor, then, is under the bishop, who oversees multiple churches (each with their own pastor and unique elders). However, this model is not found in the bible at all. Instead, we see something remarkably different:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. (1 Peter 5:1-5)

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church... ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:17 and 28)

Both these passages illustrate that overseers and elders are tasked with shepherding (pastoring) the church. Notice in the first passage above, Peter, an actual apostle, introduces himself as an *elder*. The natural meaning of the word *elder* simply means an older man. This simple meaning of the word becomes evident when contrasted with the younger men referenced in the beginning of verse 5.

The elders are tasked with shepherding and overseeing the church. Both shepherd and “exercise oversight” are the verb forms of the same Greek words used for pastor and overseer (bishop) in Ephesians chapter 4, Titus chapter 1, and First Timothy chapter 3. Elders being shepherds is also made apparent by Peter contrasting their shepherding role with Jesus being the Chief Shepherd.

In the second passage Paul calls the elders of Ephesus to Miletus to address them while on his journey to Jerusalem. While in Miletus, he addressed the elders as overseers and told them to shepherd the church and be on guard for all the flock. Thus, the elders were the overseers tasked with shepherding the church. In both these passages, we see elders, pastors, and bishops were the same groups of people.

The premise that elders, pastors, and bishops were the same people is also evident in the earliest Ante-Nicene writings (the *Didache*, for example). However, the shift to differentiating bishops from elders (with no mention of pastors) was an early innovation. Though the scriptures offer no support for this distinction, some still speculate it may have been introduced by the longest-living apostle, John. Those who subscribe to this understanding believe this because some of John’s disciples adopted the practice of separating the role of plural elders and a single bishop.

Here is where I defer to the scriptures. The premise and foundation adopted by our mission is to submit to the most natural reading of the scriptures, which we believe is alone inspired and authoritative. We resort to referring to the Ante-Nicene writings only to settle disputes within the scriptures, and never to adopt a teaching that is not even presented in the scriptures. Therefore, we subscribe to the biblical teaching that bishops are elders who shepherd the church.

Before we address the matter of appointment of local church leaders (overseers and deacons), I want to very briefly discuss the roles of the other five-fold ministers. We have already mentioned apostles and prophets, and their role in laying the foundation of the church. Apostles (modern equivalent, missionary) are *sent ones*. Prophets are those who hear from God, to edify, exhort, and console the church (1 Corinthians 14:3, 26). Detailing all the ways God speaks to the church through revelatory gifts is outside the scope of this book. I refer you to my prior books, specifically *Christianity Unleashed* and *Christianity Advanced*, for more details.

The itinerant nature of the ministry of apostle is obvious, for the meaning is embedded in the word itself. Likewise, the itinerant nature of evangelists is equally evident. What is less understood today is the itinerant nature of prophets and teachers. In the book of Acts, we see that prophets traveled from church to church (Acts 11:27, 13:1, 15:32, 21:10). This was also the case in the Ante-Nicene church. Teachers were likewise itinerant roles, visiting the various churches (Acts 13:1, 1 Timothy 2:7, 2 Timothy 1:11). One of the responsibilities of an overseer was to teach (Titus 1:9, 1 Timothy 3:2), but there were also traveling teachers going from church to church.

In modern times, the role of itinerant minister has been nearly completely lost or abandoned. Some denominations have traveling *preachers* who visit churches, mostly within their own denominations, who are called evangelists. However, this has nothing to do with the biblical role, which involves preaching *outside the church*, to the lost. Many so-called evangelists today hold spiritual pep rallies rather than doing biblical evangelism.

The same dysfunction can be seen in the role of missionaries, the modern-day equivalents to apostles. Many missionaries today are really long-distance deacons, focused on helping the needy, rather than doing the work associated with an apostolic ministry in scripture.

So today we are largely left with the roles of pastor (who runs the church, like a CEO); bishop (who oversees multiple churches); elder (who is generally a lay leader that assists the pastor); and deacon (who

is often no more than a property manager). And we wonder why the church is so ineffective as compared to the early church? The DNA for a healthy church has little chance of being passed down to generations when those who are tasked with the job have misunderstood or minimized biblical leadership in the church. Likewise, we replace the ministry of all believers with the elevated gifts of a few, thereby creating an ineffective and unproductive shadow of what Christ intended for His glorious body.

Leadership

Leadership is vital for the success of a church. As I stated earlier, churches range from authoritarian hegemonies, to entertaining social clubs, to leaderless home meetings. All these are poor substitutes for the true, healthy, and holy bride of Christ. The health and effectiveness of the church, therefore, will be determined by the leadership. It is the leadership who will set the foundation and establish the DNA for all successive generations of disciples. It is the indigenous leadership who will be tasked with carrying that DNA forth and resisting compromise. There will be no successful church without capable, biblical leadership.

With that said, an effective leader will leverage *influence* more than *authority*. It is their role to point to Jesus—the Word and the truth—without favoritism or bias. Their authority should be reserved for defending the truth, not opinion. They persuade with the Word rather than forcing their personal convictions. They are not a cult of personality. They are called servants, using their gifts for the Lord’s service and the edification of the body.

Above all, leaders should live out what they teach. Hypocrisy is the impetus for rebellion. Respect is earned, not demanded. It comes from living a life that is above reproach. Leaders are not perfect. They are not immune to making mistakes. Rather, they are humble and mature enough to accept their mistakes and make corrections in their lives. They are secure enough to confess their errors and seek the Lord and others for forgiveness when in error.

Where do leaders come from? Ultimately, God calls (through the prophets) and sends the foundation builders (apostles). Christ said He would build His church, and He has never stopped building. These are the pioneers God uses.

Where does the next generation of leaders come from?

²¹ After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” ²³ When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. (Titus 1:5)

Here are the only two examples we see in the bible of appointing elders in the churches. In the first example, Paul and Barnabas went out on their first missionary journey as Jesus commanded, preaching the kingdom of God with demonstrations of power. They made many disciples, baptizing those who believed and repented. Then they returned to the churches later to strengthen and encourage the disciples in the faith and appoint elders in every church. I can tell you from my experience doing the same work that this was not as quick or as easy as it appears to be presented. We actually have no way of knowing how much time this work took.

In the second passage Paul is writing a letter to Titus, telling him to do in Crete the same work he had done with Barnabas in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. Since Paul was not there with him, he wrote down exactly what Titus needed to look for in appointing elders.

In both of these passages we see the elders were appointed by the apostles. Titus was an itinerant minister, also an apostle and teacher, though not named an apostle in scripture (2 Corinthians 8:23). Paul and

Barnabas, on the other hand, were named as apostles (Acts 14:4, 14). Also note that the elders were appointed *from among the saints*, and not imported from outside. In both examples, the disciples were made and churches planted in the absence of permanent local indigenous leadership. The apostles returned to the churches at a later date, after an absence of an unspecified duration.

This shows distinctly that a church is an assembly of called out ones. It does not become “a church” when leaders are appointed. It was *already* a church! An immature and developing church, most assuredly; a church in transition, perhaps. But it was a church nonetheless.

New churches are supported by itinerant workers. Throughout the epistles we see Paul constantly sending his co-laborers (other itinerant workers) to and from all the churches. Apostles, prophets, and teachers would visit the churches to strengthen and encourage them. The heavy lifting is done in establishing the DNA. Once the premise and foundation is set among the believers, then the Word itself keeps them grounded. They hold each other accountable.

We have an enormous advantage over the earliest disciples in that we can buy bibles (all the “scrolls” at once), with everything the apostles wrote to all the churches, neatly bound. They had to travel great distances to meet face-to-face for extended periods and circulated letters to bring their disciples to maturity.

Lastly, they appointed *elders*, and not *an* elder, or in the modern sense, a single pastor. Each church had a plurality of elders, not singular leadership. The passages state that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in all the churches, whereas Titus was told to appoint elders in every city. Let me explain what I think this means. Here in Kenya we have plural leadership, but shared leadership. We have several ordained elders who oversee a group of churches. Like in scripture, our churches are smaller, meeting in private homes. Not every church has brethren who would be biblically qualified to be appointed as elders. And since we are all located in the same region, shared leadership works perfectly. After experiencing the dynamics of a fast-growing discipleship and church planting movement first hand, I have come to believe that this is what the earliest apostles are describing in the text by appointing elders in every church and in every city.

What are the qualifications for elders?

⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, ⁶ *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. ⁷ For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9)

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*.

² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶ *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

The first and most obvious qualification comes from the definition of the word *elder*, which means *older*. I did not recognize the significance of this word until I moved to Kenya. Kenya, which shares much of its culture with the Middle Eastern culture of the bible, recognizes a clear elder/youth distinction, just like we

find in scripture. In fact, many of the New Testament words come alive when reading the Swahili translation, which does not have the theological connotation that the English adds to the Greek words.

In Kenya, *wazee* (elders) are generally men over forty years old. Though the word does not restrict gender in either Swahili or Greek, it is commonly used for men, with context always added when specifically referring to women. In Kenya, youth are people under thirty-five years of age. However, age is not the only hard-and-fast qualifier; younger men who evidence wisdom and are married are also welcomed and respected among the elders and can even be called elders.

So Titus was commanded by Paul to set in order what remained and to appoint elders in all of the cities in Crete. He was told to select *older men*. However, age alone was certainly not sufficient qualification. In verse six Paul starts to narrow down the pool of potential older men, and in verse seven makes a sudden change from the word *elder* to *overseer*. Then he presents specific details on the qualifications of an overseer of the church. Their task would be to shepherd the flock.

Instead of reviewing all the qualifications cited in the two passages, I will highlight a few important points. The first to note is that the elders to be appointed as overseers were to be married with children. They were once-married. Our understanding is that this means not remarried and not polygamous. (Again, living in Kenya this becomes an important distinction because remarriage and polygamy are common.) Overseers must be trustworthy with money and properly disciple their children. They must have overall good character and be respected inside and outside the fellowship. And they must not be new converts.

The passage about the appointment of elders in every church on Paul's first missionary journey was so succinct, it seems as though Paul and Barnabas baptized people on Monday and appointed elders by Thursday. However, this condition for overseers, that they were *not to be new converts*, shows the necessity of time. Both passages quoted make it clear that the overseers were appointed from the older men in the fellowship; they were indigenous saints and were not imported. Since they were appointed from the local body and new converts could not be considered, it is my opinion that some substantial time must have elapsed between the making of the first disciples and the appointing of overseers. In my experience, it can take years.

Though not specified in either passage, the gender of appointed elders is also important. If the fact that the word *elder* is not gender-specific left any doubt, the use of the word *husband* and the responsibility of managing the household and being respected by children should clinch it. Appointed elders or overseers (pastors) are to be men. The scriptures are clear, and the Ante-Nicene witness confirms this obvious interpretation.

In the examples considered, overseers were appointed by the apostles. However, Acts 20:28 says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (emphasis added). Here it says that *the Holy Spirit* had made them overseers, with no mention of them being appointed by the apostles at all. To offer some understanding, let us look at when the seven deacons were first appointed:

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native* Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving *of food*.² So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables."³ Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."⁵ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip,

Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶ And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

We see three participants in the appointment of leaders: the apostles, the congregation, and the Holy Spirit. The congregation was summoned by the apostles to pick men with requisite character, who were confirmed by the Holy Spirit's fullness. The congregation ultimately chose the deacons. The apostles provided the criteria and their blessing, and ordained them with the laying on of hands. They had concurrence from the Holy Spirit; their lives and character attested to the Holy Spirit's choosing.

I recognize that this example applies specifically to ordaining deacons. However, I think we can safely assume from the other passages we have read (and because the qualifications of overseers and deacons were in the same passage in First Timothy chapter 3) that the same practice applies.

I can also offer some anecdotal support from my experience in the field, working as an itinerant minister. Itinerant ministers do not have the privilege of intimately knowing the personal lives and character of the members of distant fellowships. It is only the local congregations who really know their members, because they live together and interact with one another inside and outside the church. Distant disciples always put on their best behavior when itinerant workers visit. Therefore, with such a detailed list of qualifications provided in scripture, it is imperative that the local congregation attest to the qualifications of their own future leaders.

I want to briefly mention the other leaders. I have already introduced the deacon, who is simply (by definition of the word) a servant. His role is to serve the needs inside and possibly outside the fellowship. Obviously men and women can both be servants in the natural sense of the Greek word. However, the biblical text isn't clear whether or not both genders qualify for the role:

⁸ Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, ⁹ *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. ¹¹ Women *must* likewise *be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

The confusion lies in whether the word *women* in verse 11 above refers to women deacons or the wives of the deacons. Phoebe, a co-laborer with Paul, was named a deacon (Romans 16:1). The confusion with that passage is whether or not the word refers to the natural sense of serving or the ordained office of deacon. Our practice in our mission is to permit anyone to serve who is faithful, regardless of gender. We err on the conservative and only formally *ordain* (appoint, or publicly recognize) men with the laying on of hands. (Titles are irrelevant as far as I am concerned.)

What is very important is that the candidates are first tested. In our ministry, deacons handle all the finances. Expositors of the Word focus on the Word, and deacons focus on serving the needs (see Acts 6:2-4). They must be trustworthy to administer finances without compromise. Deacons must be given more and more opportunity and responsibility to prove their trustworthiness before you publicly appoint them for such a vital role.

In the interim before qualified persons emerge for appointment as deacons, the work of collecting offerings and serving the needy still continues. In our churches we permit each fellowship to select three non-ordained, interim "deacons" to serve in the capacity. We require at least two of the three interim deacons to be present for counting the money and for any distributions made to needy brethren. A public announcement of the amount of the offering is made at the time of collection during the fellowship

gathering and all transactions are recorded in a ledger. This practice ensures complete transparency and accountability. All money coming in and going out is documented in a notebook for any member to inspect at any time. Ordained deacons are the only church members permitted to handle funds alone; all other brethren must handle ministry funds in pairs, at minimum.

I've also already discussed various itinerant ministers as leaders; though their qualifications are not itemized like the local ministers, we hold to the position that they need to at least meet the qualifications of local ministers, with a few exceptions. We read in First Timothy 4:12 that Timothy was a youth. We know from historical writings that Paul and many of his companions who were apostles, teachers, and evangelists were unmarried men. Therefore, age and family situation are not prescriptive for itinerants.

We do see that the church ordained itinerant ministers, just as they did their local leaders. Paul and Barnabas were sent forth with the laying on of hands in Acts 13:3. Timothy, who was identified as an apostle (1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6), teacher, and evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) was ordained by the elders of the church (1 Timothy 4:11-16, 2 Timothy 1:6). Our mission likewise recognizes itinerant ministers, teachers, evangelists, and apostles, with the laying on of hands.

The method by which we identify and appoint ministers for the public laying on of hands encompasses all of the three elements described above: apostolic appointment, congregational agreement, and selection by the Holy Spirit. We do have within our body the gift of identifying people's spiritual gifts and calls (ministries). This is in no way a qualification for ordination. Someone's ministry is forged through walking it out and attaining to a certain level of maturity. God grants only the *opportunity* to step into the gift or call, but not the readiness, or stepping out. The benefit of the supernatural assessment is to inform the leaders and mature believers how best to train and equip the new disciple. It's simply a launching pad for their potential, future ministry.

Those who are qualified for ordination will become self-evident following years of mentoring, field service, training and instruction. We don't rush the process. It happens organically. In fact, those qualified are respected for their role and leadership long before they receive formal recognition. They would not be worthy of ordination if this were not the case. Paul instructed Timothy to bide his time with ordaining leaders (1 Timothy 5:19-22); we do the same.

In our ministry, the qualifications for leadership are specifically spelled out in direct accordance with the scriptures where possible. According to our constitution, I nominate candidates per qualifications and identified gifts. We fast and pray for direct revelation of the Lord's endorsement of my selection. The nominees are presented to the local church, along with any prophetic reports received, for their vote. In this way, all three biblical roles are represented in the appointment of leadership.

I do not see a biblical precedent for the ordination of prophets or deliverance ministers (the term *exorcist* is used in many English translations of the early church writings). Therefore, our mission does not ordain those who serve in these capacities because of their gifts. Prophecy and deliverance can naturally occur in the duties of the other itinerant ministers and the overseer, both of whom can be ordained in those roles.

Hopefully by now you have an understanding of where church leadership comes from and what the qualifications for leadership are; or, at least, what an apostolic mission would look like if based on the scriptures. I understand that most people today fellowship in a ministry that is not apostolic in origin, and which therefore would not likely evidence the DNA presented in this book. I will save addressing my suggestions on what to do in those situations for a later chapter. For now, we'll return to the practices and purposes of the church.

The Practices of the Church and their Purposes

The body of Christ was established with specific objectives in mind. If you simply believe that Jesus came and suffered just to redeem you unto eternal life, you are mistaken. You were bought with a price, and not just for your own benefit. You now belong to Him for His service. You were redeemed to escape the corruption of this world so that you could be of use in His kingdom. You were redeemed from your former lusts so that you could now yearn for the things of God. You were called out of darkness for a purpose: to do His work.

The church is His body, His hands and feet, to accomplish His purposes here on earth. We already discussed one of those purposes at great length: the Great Commission. I covered that first because of the preeminent role evangelism serves in actually establishing the church, which is the theme of this book. The church is borne of the assembling of disciples. Disciples are made by going out, preaching the kingdom, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey Jesus. The Great Commission encompasses a lot. But once the church is established, what do they do?

In this chapter I want to discuss the activities of the primitive church detailed in scripture and elaborate their significance. If we gain an understanding of the primary functions of each of the church practices, we can assess our modern practices to see if we are achieving the same purposes of the practices of the apostolic church.

We've already noted that the early Christians met in private homes; in fact, there are no examples of the church meeting anywhere other than in private homes. All meetings outside the home in the bible were evangelistic, and not the regular Christian fellowship. This practice continued during the Ante-Nicene period.

When we discuss what occurred at these meetings, we can begin to recognize some of the purposes for them. With the purpose in mind, we may identify advantages and disadvantages of the practice of home fellowship.

Two clear examples of the practices of the earliest church are found in the book of Acts, immediately after Pentecost and soon thereafter:

⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

³² And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one *of them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³ And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

In these passages we see the following activities: teaching (the apostles' teaching); prayer; signs and wonders; giving; sharing with the needy; daily public meetings; breaking of bread (communion) in

homes; testifying; sharing meals; enjoying unity of mind, heart, and soul; and evangelism. Every one of these activities is mentioned by the apostles in the epistles. Now let's see why they are significant.

We already discussed the itinerant ministry role of teacher, and likewise that teaching was also a qualification to be appointed an overseer. Note that those elders who were appointed as overseers had to be "able to teach" and "[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict," prior to his appointment. It seems obvious that if an overseer ought to be able to teach, he has had ample opportunity to practice; therefore, anyone with the gift of teaching is free to teach when believers gather.

In the earliest days of the church of Acts, the apostles were actually physically present to teach in person. Therefore, "the apostles' teachings" we read about were most likely the apostles publicly sharing with the congregation. That would have changed, however, as the church expanded regionally and the number of churches exceeded the number of apostles. However, the next generation of teachers did not teach a different doctrine, but rather taught what they had heard the apostles teach and eventually what they wrote in their letters. As time went on, future generations of teachers came to rely on what was written by the apostles, since they were no longer privy to having heard them personally. That practice continues to this day (or at least should). Note that even the gospels, which document the teachings of Jesus, were written by the apostles (yes, Mark and Luke were apostles too, contemporaries of Paul and Peter) and therefore they also constitute "the apostles' teachings."

Paul frequently admonished his co-laborers to teach, and to refute false teachings. The examples are numerous so I will just include a couple below:

¹³ Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching...¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (1 Timothy 4:13, 16)

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

The primary time for teaching the scriptures was the weekly gatherings:

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

Here the text says when they were gathered together to break bread, or take communion, on the first day of the week. The church was not Sabbath observant, but rather assembled on Sunday (the first day of the week), or the Lord's Day, because it was the day Jesus rose from the dead. That was the day they gathered for communion. This belief and practice is firmly established in the Ante-Nicene writings.

The later Christian tradition of calling Sunday the Sabbath is not historic; nor is changing the fourth commandment to refer to the Lord's Day rather than the Sabbath. These are deceptive innovations of the Roman Catholic church. The early church simply did not subscribe to keeping the whole of the Old Covenant requirements of the Law of Moses.

In any case, Paul was teaching on the Lord's Day in Troas. He spent seven days in Troas, yet still taught into the night on this Lord's Day. Likely he was departing the next day and had a lot to share with the saints. This leads me to believe that gathering larger groups on the other six days was not possible because of people's other responsibilities.

Let us see what a normal Lord's Day meeting looked like:

⁶What 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. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³²and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints...³⁹Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. (1 Corinthians 14:26-33, 39)

Here we see a remarkable practice—the participatory and interactive meeting. It includes various activities, such as teaching, singing, and revelatory gifts. The list of activities is by no means exhaustive when considering other scriptures which we will cover later. However, these examples are provided to make certain points and identify specific objectives.

The first point clearly made is that the purpose of the meeting was the edification of the body. The edification comes by way of song, teaching, or revelation (cited in this passage), or by way of communion, confession, healing, foot washing, sharing a meal, prayer, giving, or testifying (present in other passages). All is done for edification.

As we noted earlier, all saints have gifts and a role to play in the body of Christ. This is the reason for the participatory and interactive service—the gifted can use their gifts! For all intents and purposes, it is the Holy Spirit who is ministering through the saints. It is He who has distributed gifts to the body to build itself up. Ultimately, the saints assemble not simply to hear from men, but to hear from God. That is why Paul admonished the brethren to desire earnestly to prophesy and not to forbid the speaking in tongues. This is how God ministers to His people.

In an interactive and participatory setting, people are exposed to many different members operating in diverse gifts at different levels of maturity. As they watch, learn, and grow, they feel comfortable spreading their wings and standing up to contribute to the assembly. They grow accustomed to seeing many others participate. They can start contributing in small ways, and slowly but surely gain experience doing more and more. All this contributes towards their personal discipleship, growth, and maturity. In the process, the church is developing the next generation of leaders. This is a vital aspect of the assembly: equipping the saints for the work of service.

Another objective identified in the text is *order*. Everything is done in a fitting and orderly process. People contribute one by one. The contributors do what they do for the benefit of those listening. It's not entertainment. It's not meaningless disturbance. Everyone is led by the Holy Spirit to edify with what the Spirit has imparted to them. That is, with one substantial and noteworthy exception:

³⁴The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only? ³⁷If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. (1 Corinthians 14:34-38)

The apostle teaches emphatically, as *the Lord's commandment*, that women are to remain silent in the churches. This passage at face value seems to be in conflict with the stated objective of everyone utilizing their gifts. And women remaining silent seems also to conflict with the stated purposes and objectives of some of those gifts. Let's clear up this seeming contradiction.

We have already mentioned that prophecy is for the edification of the body. This is discussed at length earlier in the same chapter of First Corinthians:

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. ²For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. ³But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. (1 Corinthians 14:1-3)

It is clear that prophecy is intended for the edification of the church and is to be exercised in the assembly of the saints. Elsewhere, we see that women can prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5, Acts 21:9). The obvious conclusion is that prophecy is not part of the restriction (this conclusion was articulated using the same exact defense in the Ante-Nicene writings). So what is specifically prohibited as pertains to women? Let's look elsewhere in scripture:

¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. ¹⁴ And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Timothy 2:11-14)

Here Paul further elaborates on the purpose of the restrictions. The First Corinthians passage seemed to be limited to eliminating interruptions or distractions to maintain order. Here Paul explains further reasons for the restrictions, for women to not exercise authority over men, and possibly because women are more predisposed to deception. Regardless, Paul here clearly sets boundaries upon women's silence, to include teachings and exerting authority. This view seems to reconcile with the balance of scripture, and likewise was supported by the Ante-Nicene witness. This is the position of our mission: women are prohibited from teaching the Word or leading (as an "emcee") during the service. However, we permit women to sing, pray, testify, and operate in the revelatory gifts.

Some people view this prohibition as draconian. My response is, it's in the bible. God is God and is the inspiration of these scriptures. Paul said these are the practices in all the churches, that it's the Lord's commandment, and not to recognize anyone who teaches otherwise. And I might add, in the pastor-centric pulpit ministry, it is not just the women who are silenced; the entire congregation is silenced. The system permits one voice and reduces every member to spectators. No one is permitted to participate or exercise their gifts. Yet no one complains.

For those who try to use the argument that these verses were cultural and were only written to address specific problems in Corinth, I say, there is absolutely no historical evidence for this argument. It is simply speculation, an attempt to eliminate objectionable biblical passages. The fact that Paul referred all the way back to the Genesis account supports that this was not cultural, and was fundamental truth. And for those who argue that these prohibitions are lifted in Christ, note Paul is writing *to the churches*, fully aware of everything pertaining to Christ and the church.

This is a brief overview of the various passages that pertain to the "order of worship" observed by the early Christians when they assembled together. We see that the "order" was given by the Holy Spirit as each one exercised their gifts of teaching, singing, prophecy, tongues, and so on. In this way, the body is built up for service to God.

The Main Purpose for the Assembly

In passages previously cited, there were three mentions of the phrase “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 46, and 20:7). I tipped my cards and parenthetically wrote *communion* several times. However, that assertion might not be apparent to the casual reader. Let us dive into the scriptures on this topic:

²⁰ Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples...²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.”²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:20, 26-28, see also Mark 14:22 and Luke 22:19).

This was the Passover meal, the Last Supper, the night before Jesus was crucified. The original Passover occurred during the final plague upon the Egyptians; the Hebrews were spared death by the blood of the lamb painted on their doorposts. The Passover was symbolic of the Lamb of God who would shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins (John 1:29). The symbolism was deep.

And the Last Supper draws even greater symbolism, of us dining with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb in His kingdom (see Matthew 26:29, Luke 22:15-18, Matthew 22:1-14, Revelation 19:7-9). As we come to the Lord’s Table, we are certainly to remember the Lamb who died to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). But we are also to be reminded of Christ the King, who eagerly waits for His bride to join Him at His table in His kingdom.

Here is how the apostle Paul instructed the observance of the sacrament of communion:

²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. ³⁰ For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. ³³ So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1 Corinthians 11:20-33)

Now in context, you can see Paul was clearly correcting an error at the church in Corinth. However, the way the admonition was presented highlights several important points we can learn from. In Acts 20:7, we saw that Paul had gathered with the church on Sunday to break bread. An easily overlooked point in that passage is that they were assembled to *break bread*.

Breaking bread was the primary reason for their gathering. And from the numerous passages above we see that breaking bread is clearly a reference to the Lord’s Supper, communion.

Here in the First Corinthians passage, we see the same language. In verse 20: “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” and also in verse 33: “So then, my brethren, when you come

together to eat, wait for one another.” They assembled *to eat the Lord’s Supper* and *came together to eat*. The centerpiece of the meeting, the primary reason they gathered, was to partake in communion.

Another important point captured in Paul’s correction of the errors in Corinth was that the communion sacrament was not some trite religious ceremony. It was actually a full meal. Looking back it was the Passover feast, and looking forward it is the marriage supper of the Lamb. At neither would we be satisfied with a wafer and a thimble full of juice. Paul rebuked the wealthy brethren for not waiting for, and sharing their food with, the other brethren. All attendees were expected to go home satisfied. Jude called the weekly meal the “love feast,” as did the Ante-Nicene church (Jude 12). It was a meal.

The apostle Paul also emphasized that partaking in the sacrament was about unity:

¹⁶The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the *communion* of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ? ¹⁷For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, emphasis added, KJV)

Here I intentionally used the King James Version because in that translation we see the word *communion* used, which is most often translated *fellowship*. The early church often referred to the sacrament as the *Eucharist*, which means thanksgiving, because Jesus gave thanks. So the participants in the Eucharist would fellowship with Christ and one another in partaking. Therefore, to be in communion means to be in fellowship, just as to be ex-communicated means to be dis-fellowshipped. Thus, the members of a local fellowship are to be *in communion*. We will return to this topic later.

Why is communion so very important? I would go so far as to say that it has eternal significance:

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. (John 6:53-56)

This is some heavy teaching. In fact, most of Jesus’ followers could not receive it and abandoned Him after this (John 6:66). But Jesus knew exactly what He was saying. Jesus died on the cross once and for all for our sins. Although His blood was sufficient to cover all sin, not everyone will be forgiven through it. We must believe, repent, be baptized, and bear fruit to partake in the free gift of salvation. And when we repent and are baptized, our past sins are forgiven—completely gone at that very moment. What about our future sins?

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

Read the passage above and replace the word *fellowship* with *communion*; it is the same Greek word. We must be *in communion* with Christ and one another for the blood of Christ to cleanse us from all sin. If we say we have no sin we are confused and lost. If we confess our sins He forgives us. It’s all very clear and simple. If we do not repent and confess our sins, we remain in that sin and will die in that sin. As we saw in Paul’s teaching on the Eucharist in First Corinthians 11, we are commanded to properly inspect ourselves. If we don’t, we can expect troubles. Implied in the teaching is that we will confess and repent upon that introspection. James also repeats a similar teaching:

...if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. (James 5:15b-16)

The Lord's Supper—the communion service, the love feast—is the primary purpose for the weekly gathering of the saints. It is a time for fellowship (communion) with Christ and the brethren, a time to feast and give thanks to God, a time for introspection, confession, and cleansing by the blood of Jesus. It brings with it eternal benefits.

Intimacy and Unity

To be in communion is to be in fellowship and to be one together with others. We share each others' burdens. We rejoice together and struggle together. I have scarcely mentioned the significance and value of meeting together in homes. There is nothing more intimate than welcoming our dearest friends into our home and sharing a meal together. As we share the Lord's Table, confessing our sins to one another exposes our vulnerability and shows our weakness. It engenders humility and reveals our deep need for God's grace and the prayers and encouragement of our brethren. This experience is not possible among strangers, the unsaved, or in a large crowd. These experiences are reserved for the small, intimate fellowship experience in the living room of our brethren, among our fellow sojourners. There is no substitute.

In the smaller home environment, brethren are much more likely to be transparent about their struggles, prayer needs, and even praise reports. In a crowd, many tend to be shy and keep to themselves. In the home fellowship, however, people are free to participate.

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:13-18)

Here James highlights several additional practices of the assembly of the saints, many of which we saw in previous passages. We are to pray together and sing praises together; as Paul said: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). We are to share in others' joys and sorrows, expressing deep needs to the Lord in prayer.

We read earlier that the church of Acts experienced signs and wonders. Here we see healing as one such work of the Lord which will manifest among us as it did in the case of Elijah (who was "a man with a nature like ours"). Believe me when I say I see miracles at nearly every church gathering. *Believing is seeing* (2 Corinthians 5:7).

As well, we confess our sins to one another. This is so very personal and intimate. This is real life; this is family. This is the way it is supposed to be—the way it once was and the way it can be as we gather in the fellowship of the saints.

In our churches, we do receive visitors. They attend the interactive service time which includes testimonies, teachings, and prayer requests. We also welcome the visitors for the meal time. After that time they are dismissed (along with the unbaptized children), and the baptized members continue on with "member's only" activities. Before our visitors depart, however, we coordinate a visit from one of our teachers/evangelists to offer them teachings and the opportunity for joining us. We always tell them *you only need to be a visitor once: next time you join us, you can do so as a brother*.

Our brethren resume with activities unique to the saints. This next one may be foreign to some, but its intimacy truly fosters unity:

³ *Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, ⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He

girded Himself. ⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded... ¹² So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor *is* one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:3-5, 12-17)

Jesus set an example for us—an example of complete and total humility; of love, intimacy, and service. Three times in the above passage He tells us we should do the same. This is actually a command, not a suggestion or just a nice practice. He knew that many would not take this seriously, so He was emphatic, because He knew that the humility, love, and intimacy expressed in foot-washing were vital for the health of a fellowship.

Following foot washing is when we publicly confess our sins to one another. Every person speaks in turn. Rarely does someone remain silent. Normally everyone shares their struggles for the week and asks the Lord to forgive them. During confession, brethren present the bread from which everyone takes a small piece, and another brother distributes juice in individual cups. One brother prays for the group and then we all partake in the bread and cup together.

Establishing the right DNA in a fellowship right from the beginning is arguably the most important element of maintaining unity in the body. However, it is incumbent upon us to continually foster that sense of oneness. This happens during communion, but we have also included other practices that encourage unity and spiritual growth: mid-week meetings, prayer meetings, and fasting meetings. Seeking and hearing from God together in short and extended fasts, worshipping together, all-night and regular corporate and small group prayer meetings all keep the excitement and commitment alive. The prophetic and other gifts move powerfully, testifying of God's presence and work in the body; it guides our service and outreach to the neediest. Through this prayer in unity and movement of God, our evangelism efforts are ignited. Recall that an organism that is not growing is dying; an organism that fails to reproduce is one generation away from extinction.

Without such times of gathering in prayer and fellowship, the church stagnates and succumbs to rote routine with little life or growth.

I cover all of these activities and practices in great detail in prior books (the books in this series) so I won't repeat that content here. However, I would be remiss not to address one important aspect of fellowship: the ground rules for sharing revelations, as we have already highlighted the prophetic gifting and its importance in the edification of the body.

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. ⁴ One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. (1 Corinthians 14:3-4)

Whether it comes from a dream, vision, prophecy, word of knowledge, discerning of spirits, or tongues with interpretation, the revelation is given by God to edify, exhort, or console. Sometimes revelations are personal. Sometimes they are corporate in nature. The prophet must use wisdom in discerning whether or not information should be publicly shared. Our general guideline is that if specific people are in the revelation, we do not use names or share any revelations that will easily identify the individuals in the prophecy (unless the Lord specifically indicates that such details should be shared). We don't want to shame people—we want to edify them! Typically, if it is a personal message, it is shared personally and not with the group. And personal prophesies should never be fodder for gossip. If one can't be faithful in administering the gift, it will quickly be compromised or even taken away.

Any reports given by God will never contradict the Word of God. We are commanded to examine prophetic utterances carefully, and hold fast to that which is good (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21). It is advisable for someone other than the prophet to interpret the prophecy, unless the revelation itself is a direct message rather than symbolic. Also note that many revelations are given for us to act upon. Grim reports are not fated, but rather can prompt us to prayer or action to mitigate potential challenges on the horizon. Remember, God is on our side and warns His children of impending hazards to prepare us or protect us. Two identical reports mean certainty; three or more identical reports mean imminence. In either case, prayer is our most powerful weapon as a church.

Suffice it to say, the more time we spend together concerning matters of the Lord, the stronger we become both in unity and spiritual maturity. Likewise, laboring together (both for the Lord and in secular enterprise) also builds unity and intimacy. All of these are great opportunities for strengthening the saints and the church and should be part of the body's regular practices.

Maintaining Purity of the Body

The church is the “called out” ones, the holy people of God, for without holiness, no one will see the Lord (see Hebrews 12:14). The church must maintain a high standard of holiness in order to authentically bear witness to the truth of Christ. We can’t represent Christ and be His body while living like the world. We were called out of darkness into His marvelous light for the purpose of doing His works, being His hands and feet. We are salt and light, the light of the world. Salt that loses its saltiness is fit for nothing, and is to be tossed out.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump *of dough*? ⁷ Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. ⁸ Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹ I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? ¹³ But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Corinthians 5:6-13)

The apostle Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for not keeping the church holy. A man was in sin, and they ignored the behavior (thus permitting it). They completely failed to deal with the matter. In this passage, Paul rebukes the whole *church*, and not the actual sinner. This is because they were disobeying Christ:

¹⁵ “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:15-18)

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. (Luke 17:3)

Church discipline is not optional; it is a command. Jesus very specifically and directly commanded His followers to go to brothers who are in sin and confront them in private. The objective is evident: to bring them to repentance and restore them to holiness.

We are not commanded to try to hold non-believers to the same standard as believers, for they are ignorant and first need illumination and salvation. We are expected to engage them and therefore interact with them. Christians, on the other hand, are supposed to have repented and surrendered their lives to Christ. They are supposed to be called out of darkness and set apart as a people of God’s own possession. We are to hold fellow saints to the standards set forth in scripture. That is why it is so vital that we communicate those standards on the way in the door, to avoid unnecessary conflict and confrontation later.

As I stated earlier, the standards are set by Christ (the foundation) and the teachings of the apostles. The church’s authority for enforcement only goes as far as the scriptures. We have no authority or permission to litigate behaviors or practices that are not directly set forth in scripture. I emphasize this point because the exercise of church discipline is often abused by controlling leaders in the defense of church traditions, rather than scripture alone. Occasionally, it is the defendants who are upholding scripture at odds with church tradition. The church leaders, like the Pharisees in Christ’s day, find themselves fighting the Word

of God to defend their man-made traditions. The charge for expulsion is often just “insubordination,” or going against the leaders’ defense of church tradition. We need to be wary of such practices and maintain church discipline in its purity.

The objective of church discipline is to restore a brother, bringing him to see his sin and abandon it. We seldom want to expel a brother (though some cases do end this way). We really desire all to be saved and overcome sin.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Our objective is restoration. That means we approach an erring brother in gentleness, with love and patience. We do not refrain from presenting the truth, the whole truth, regardless of how uncomfortable it makes us or them. However, we try to counsel them, empathize with them, be real with them, be open with them (maybe even incorporating testimonies of our own struggles and subsequent victories). Church discipline is one of the best discipleship opportunities we encounter. Teaching only targets the mind. However, being confronted with real challenges and being counseled and corrected directly forces introspection which, when sincere, hits the heart. That is why the first step is private. It allows the brother who is intervening to approach the sinner in a way that lowers their inhibitions. It permits them to be unguarded and honest. It is most likely that they repent at this step in the process.

Note that in this first step, the confronting brother is not a church leader. It is a direct eyewitness of the sin. Going to outsiders before confronting the brother yourself often results in gossip. Where it might behoove the eyewitness to consult other witnesses before confrontation is if the accused is over the eyewitness in authority (see 1 Timothy 5:19). This applies with children accusing adults, possibly women accusing men, and as the text states, bringing accusations against an elder. In these cases I recommend the accuser consult with other eyewitnesses and bring the report to capable leaders.

If the case is not dismissed (often it’s just a misunderstanding) or the accused refuses to repent, then the matter escalates. The next step is to bring a group of eyewitnesses. There is a very important point in that admonition: the presence of eyewitnesses implies an *actual infraction*. This is not gossip, hearsay, or some innuendo. Church discipline does not apply in such cases. In those cases a brother can casually ask the suspect about the rumor, but it goes no further unless real evidence materializes. Church discipline is only to be used for *visible* sin. Yes, that means some people might be “getting away” with *hidden* sin. That is reality. This phenomenon is predicted and expected.

Jesus gave many parables where He made clear that the kingdom of God would contain both good and evil. The significant parables are the wedding feast (Matthew 22:10-14), the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50), the four soils (specifically Matthew 13:22) and the tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30, and 37-42). These two final parables are instructive concerning the scope of church discipline.

In the parable of the four soils, three out of four receive the word of the kingdom. One of those falls away quickly. One bears much fruit. The middle one referenced in verse 22 does not fall away, but also does not bear fruit. In numerous passages the New Testament teaches that the fruitless will be cut off (see John 15:6, Matthew 13:8-10, Matthew 7:19, Matthew 21:19, and Luke 13:7-9). The parable of the tares and wheat (like the parable of the dragnet) teaches that the sorting of the good and bad will be done at the end of the age by the angels. Jesus taught that if we humans uproot the plants prematurely, we could inadvertently uproot the good plants with the bad. That’s because tares look like wheat until the later phase of development when the wheat head develops its fruit.

It's not how we start that matters nearly as much as how we finish. God is patient that all may come to repentance. With proper nurturing, the fruitless may one day be fruitful. So we accept some tares, hoping one day (before the end) for their transformation. But God's patience does have a limit (Luke 13:7-9). Don't fret; typically the deceivers and hypocrites expose themselves in due time; after all, trees will be known by their fruit. When sin becomes visible, just deal with it according to Jesus' instructions on church discipline.

If they refuse to accept their sin and repent upon confrontation with multiple eyewitnesses, it is time to bring the case to the church. The church is the body of Christ, and is alone vested with the authority to expel a brother. Local church leaders do not have this authority. The scriptures do provide a single example of church discipline being exercised by apostolic authority when the church is too immature to properly carry out their duty (1 Corinthians 5:3-5). This should be a rare exception in the infancy of the church or in the event of complete moral ineptitude in the local church.

This is where things get real. Excommunication, done biblically, actually removes the offender from communion with the church and from Christ. It is not only dis-fellowshipping with a member; it is expulsion from the kingdom of God and certain condemnation! This perspective should help us discern matters of serious charge versus those that should be graciously forborne among brethren. What is binding on earth is binding in Heaven, but only if the accused is charged for sin on true biblical grounds, is judged fairly according to the precepts established in the scriptures, and refuses to repent. Obviously if someone is injudiciously tried for man-made traditions or from personal bias, excommunication is just a carnal procedure.

Once put out, wayward brethren can be restored. If they humble themselves, confess their error, and turn away from their sin, they can return to the fellowship. If they were a recent convert when they fell away, or if their sin was grievous, we consider repeating their teaching, deliverance, and even baptism. This is on a case-by-case basis, with all parties agreeing on the chosen course of action. The main things we look at are whether or not they repented when they were baptized, if they truly understood the teachings, and if they really surrendered to the lordship of Christ.

We rarely get to the third, church-wide meeting in our church discipline issues. The honest and humble usually repent before then, and the hypocrites and deceivers typically just leave us, never to return. If this occurs, we just inform everyone that they are no longer members. If a third meeting is scheduled and the offender refuses to appear, we present the case in their absence and still put them out if justified by the evidence. The church body decides.

Occasionally when the disciplinary process escalates, disciples adamantly deny the charges until confronted with the evidence. That is not repentance of the heart. They are not remorseful for their error, but only saying they repent for self-preservation. Unfortunately, we are not at liberty to differentiate between fake and authentic repentance. We will give the accused a second chance. But if they repeat the same willful error, they will be put out permanently. Unfortunately, I must confess that we have experienced a terrible record of recidivism with disciples restored after the first offence. The truth is, adults know what they are doing and if they had no conviction about a sin after being taught properly, they likely don't believe it is wrong. I am not talking here about what I will call mistakes (addictions that are strongholds and result in occasional failure, or acts of emotion or passion). I am talking about willful sins or *practicing* sin (see Hebrews 10:26 and 1 John 3:8-9).

With the proper DNA in place from the beginning (the premise and foundation presented in this book), prescribed rules on lifestyle choices such as dress styles, head covering styles, or other personal and family choices (and there are many) which are not clearly articulated in the scriptures are completely outside the authority of the church. The church can only enforce what is written in scripture. Wisdom and

suggestions are permissible. However, shaming people or invoking disciplinary action for things not clearly articulated in the bible is not acceptable.

There is one sin that we have learned through experience to take extremely seriously: divisiveness. Unity is paramount to the health of the church. It is what Jesus prayed for three times the night before He was crucified. Paul commended the saints to be united in mind, love, spirit, and purpose in humility. Division is the antithesis of God's will for the body. I have emphasized from the very beginning of this book that every new member should come in the door with the same teachings and practices, imparting the same exact DNA. If they can't accept the DNA of the church, bid them farewell. Please do not ever welcome as members those who cannot accept the very foundations laid by Christ for His church.

If you find yourself with a member who is divisive, correct them. Re-explain the foundation and premise of the church. Re-introduce the DNA to them. Try to come to terms with the source of the disagreement leading to their divisive behavior. If they have an honest and good heart, they will cease the behavior. If they are quarrelsome, prideful, jealous, selfishly ambitious, or have some ulterior motive, it will be obvious. Watch for people seeking material advantage or power. These people may repent in actions (at least visibly), but can resume destructive behaviors among the weaker brethren. Follow Paul's admonition: "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11).

We have never experienced such a person being restored successfully. Some claimed repentance, but after some time resorted to their former destructive behaviors. These are the wolves that the shepherds are admonished to protect the flock from. I will close the chapter with this warning:

²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:27-31)

Traditions

I have covered the importance of obeying both the commands and teachings of Christ and the apostles. What about traditions? Not all traditions are bad. In fact, the New Testament mentions traditions; some are presented negatively and others in a more positive light.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

² Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:2)

¹⁵ So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

⁶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (2 Thessalonians 3:6)

These passages differentiate between man-made traditions and apostolic traditions. Jesus dealt with this matter with those under the Old Covenant. He repeatedly rebuked the religious leaders of His day for elevating human traditions above God's commandments: "He was also saying to them, 'You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition'" (Mark 7:9, see also Mark 7:1-13).

We have already discussed the appropriateness of following the practices of Jesus and the apostles. We were commanded to walk as they walked, following their example. In the passage above, we were also advised to follow the apostolic traditions, whether by word of mouth or by letter. Well, we have the letters; they make up our New Testament. However, we don't have recordings of their speech. What we do have is the witness of their disciples in the Ante-Nicene writings. These writings give us additional insight into their oral tradition. Again, I don't espouse using the Ante-Nicene writings to expand our bible. The scriptures alone are inspired and authoritative. However, we should use these writings to validate what the scriptures already say. That contributes towards creating a firm foundation for establishing godly traditions in lieu of man-made ideas.

Subscribing to man-made traditions that conflict with commands (and I can think of many) is wholly unacceptable. On the other hand, following man-made traditions that conflict with biblical traditions is simply questionable at best. The determination of whether those traditions should be followed or abandoned must be assessed by identifying the original intended objectives of the biblical tradition. I reiterate, however, that we must not accept a man-made tradition that usurps a biblical command.

The theme of this book is church, a unified body that is growing and doing the work of the Lord. Because there are many church traditions that directly impact mission effectiveness, I thought it would be helpful to discuss just a few of the more common ones.

One tradition is holding the meeting in a building specifically designed for church gatherings. As we have stated earlier, this tradition has no precedent in the bible or the early church. So how does having a special religious building impact accomplishing the purposes and objectives of the church?

We have already discussed that the church is people, and does not consist of a building or structure. Therefore, in theory, the location where the fellowship meets should not matter. What matters is what we do *in* the structure.

The fellowship in the home is personal, warm, welcoming, and inviting. Fellowship in the home engenders personal interaction and the development of relationships. Since the home is limited in capacity, members normally know each other personally and intimately. The seating arrangement in a private home is typically everyone facing one another, facilitating interaction and communication. The big church, on the other hand, is usually stadium seating, everyone facing the one person up front, while staring at the back of each other's heads. This is certainly not conducive to relationship-building.

Related to this, another tradition worth noting is the pastor-centric service. This is actually not just a tradition; it is direct disobedience to the command for the assembly to be participatory and interactive (1 Corinthians 14:26). The practice of only one person standing with a microphone and everyone else silent has many extremely detrimental impacts on the fellowship. First of all, it cements the clergy/laity distinction. That itself is a spiritual gift killer, immobilizing the potential workforce. Yet the leaders are supposed to equip the saints for the work of God, not do it all themselves.

The practice of women's silence is often disputed, whereas the practice of complete congregational silence has been accepted without a second thought. Through Christ, God has instituted the priesthood of all believers, and imparted gifts in all saints specifically for the edification of the body. God Himself ministers to His people through these gifts. Revelatory gifts are God's way of directly communicating with His people. It is a travesty that the church system silences not just men, but they silence God, by never granting an opportunity for the gifted to proclaim God's revelations to the people. It is shameful that the system does not permit the saints to testify, sing praises, and teach from the leading of the Holy Spirit. All are silenced to maintain order. But this is not God's order. It is the order of man-made traditions.

The pastor-centric ministry is sometimes intimidated by the prophetic, apostolic, evangelistic, and teaching ministries. These ministries are designed to work together for the furtherance of God's purposes and advancement of the kingdom of God. Together, they are intended to equip all saints for the work of ministry. However, if the pastor is the *de facto* leader, and he himself may not have the requisite gifts to train young, up-and-coming five-fold ministers, he does not know what to do with them. The church system labels these potential powerhouses of the faith rebels, when they are simply trying to discover their calls and roles in a system that does not recognize or want them. This is a disgraceful mistake.

The building-based church model (a component of the pastor-centric ministry) is typically borne from a desire to add as many members as possible. The emphasis on numbers in a corporate church model often arises from the necessity of bringing in financial offerings to fund the organization itself; more members bring in more money to keep things running smoothly. This model can create an inherent conflict of interest. After all, maintaining a holy body with sincere members may not fill the seats or bring in offerings. This can lead to a slippery slope of compromising on the personal holiness of members to prevent loss of revenue. Jesus said you can't serve two masters, both God and money. But the system itself puts church leadership in this very predicament.

One of the purposes of the fellowship is partaking in the Lord's Table and sharing a full meal. The number of members in a building setting often prohibits sharing a meal and communion every week, because of both cost and logistics. Because of the spiritual and relational significance of communion, it is imperative that the saints share in communion each week when they meet. After all, this is the primary reason for the gathering. Truthfully, if the size of the fellowship is the driving factor prohibiting the

regular observance of communion and the love feast, then the size of the fellowship is itself directly conflicting with the purposes of God. Smaller is better in this regard.

These two practices, the church building and the pastor-centric meeting, have another consequence: the necessity for ample funds. I have read that over 90% of offerings collected go for just these two expenses. I know when I was the deacon of an institutional church, this was the case for us.

Buildings are very expensive to purchase and maintain. They sap the resources that could otherwise be used for things Jesus actually commanded us to do: kingdom expansion and ministering to the needy. In fact, Jesus explicitly said that we will be judged by how faithful we are in ministering to the needy around us (Matthew 25:31-46). James said that our faith is dead if we neglect our brethren in need (James 2:14-17). Yet so many Christians, believing themselves to be faithful, give to the church system which allocates only a small percentage of those funds to things Jesus actually commanded us to do. In so doing, they neglect the commandment of God for the traditions of men, the very thing Jesus abhorred and rebuked (see Mark 7:1-13).

Another tradition common to the modern religious system is setting apart a clergy class and making it a career option. The pastoral ministry is no longer simply using gifts in humble service for the edification of the body, but it is a way to make a living. The clergy path now has many specializations, all options of study in religious schools. There is an expectation for employment with a salary and benefits, not simply faithful service.

I in no way critique the faithful men who have pursued this path with an honest heart and a desire to please God. It's the system itself which is broken, not those who have been pulled into it. When the faithful get the call, the system does not offer a Plan B. In order to serve, one must submit to and become a part of the broken system, or else be alienated and passed over. The system is the gatekeeper, ensuring that all who pursue ministry become exactly like their forebears, perpetuating the broken system.

The alternative is volunteer service. Freely our gifts were given to us, by grace through faith; freely we offer our service. Jesus said that those who pray or fast for the eyes of men have received their reward in full. How much more have those who have received a comfortable salary with benefits received their reward in full?

However, I would certainly not rule out the compensation of ministers. Paul said, "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14, see verses 1-14 for context). And again Paul said:

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

These passages teach directly that ministers are rightfully to be compensated. However, the often overlooked point is, which leaders are worthy of that honor? The first passage is speaking specifically about apostles. They are itinerant workers who can't reasonably hold a job or run a business. They travel from place to place, sometimes experiencing much persecution and being forced to move frequently. For them to support themselves can be difficult and complicated.

Paul did his best to support himself through personal labor. He made tents, which was a portable enterprise that served him well (Acts 18:3). When he was ministering just periodically (weekly Sabbath days) he supported himself (1 Corinthians 9:15, Acts 18:4) in this way. But once his labors demanded his undivided attention, he was supported by the brethren (Acts 18:5). And he made it clear that as an apostle

committed to full-time service, he was entitled to that support (see Romans 9:1-18). Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable for an apostle to receive support commensurate to his labor.

The second passage speaks specifically about elders. However, the passage especially singles out specific elders: *those who work hard at preaching and teaching*. Understand that preaching is proclaiming the gospel. It is evangelism, done *outside the church*, targeting the lost. Teaching can be both an itinerant role and also for the building up of the body. I want here to make a point that I am yet to mention: we never preach to believers; we preach to the lost. We *teach* the saints. Instead of a fully-prepared sermon, there should be the “public reading of scripture,” expositing the “apostles’ teaching,” at the Lord’s Day assembly of the saints.

The elders especially worthy of support are those who work hard outside the church evangelizing the lost, not those who simply “preach” a sermon once per week and are administrators the remaining days. Recall that teaching is a gift prompted by the Holy Spirit. The gifted teacher does not require six days of preparation for a one hour performance. If the church were participatory and interactive (as intended), the fellowship wouldn’t be beholden to having a single person do all the teaching, anyway. So the modern church system with the pulpit ministry creates a job, a career, where the bible does not. That is, unless that elder (pastor) commits himself to working hard evangelizing the lost.

The importance of evangelism (outside the four walls of the church) should not be overlooked. Another difficulty that arises with the pastor- and building-centric church model is that members tend to invite their friends to church as a form of evangelism. The Sunday gathering then becomes a vehicle for reaching the lost, rather than the gathering of the saints. As a result, many churches use worldly drivers to attract parishioners to attend, in hopes that they might either be saved or become members. Churches try to be culturally relevant, with worldly style music and other garnishes to make the service entertaining. This is one extreme.

The other extreme is a holy-huddle, stoic gathering with a prescribed order of worship, dress code, picked songs, and picked teachers, all again with no basis in scripture. The Holy Spirit need not enter, for He is not welcome there.

The scriptures, on the other hand, describe a dynamic, participatory, interactive fellowship of songs, teaching, revelations, healing, supernatural gifts, a full meal, communion, and much more, all face-to-face in the comfort of a member’s living room. This is a tradition worth emulating: entertaining, yet wholesome; orderly, yet powerful. And it’s more than a tradition; it’s a command.

The biblical model is that the gathering is *for the saints*, with activities specific to the saints. The gathering is there to testify of the great things God has done outside the church during the week. Evangelism, healing, deliverances, discipleship—all ministry occurring inside and outside the fellowship—is reported as the saints come together to break bread. The resulting excitement and ongoing commitment to press on are palpable. This is the church, minus the traditions many of us have become familiar with.

Our Role in the Church

The home fellowship is not the silver bullet to solving all the problems with the church system. It's also a tradition, albeit a biblical one. Doing all the right things is not true unity. Starting with the same premise and foundation can go a long way in developing the unity that is effective, sustainable, and reproducible, but that's not a silver bullet either. I have learned that this unity is as elusive in many home fellowships as it is in most traditional churches. Achieving unity is not easy, but it *is* possible.

What I have seen brings most together to start a home fellowship is one of two things: either common rejection of the institutional church, or common beliefs. Starting a home fellowship because of prior issues with the traditional institutional church is akin to dating on the rebound after leaving a bad relationship. This seldom ends well. We should not be settling for simply a little better; we should seek the best, the real thing. We should be seeking to initiate or become an integral part of launching a unified movement with the biblical and historic DNA—life-giving DNA—to create a mission machine, a living organism that will grow and multiply.

I have seen in the self-described “kingdom” community, that although the members might have 95% agreement on their beliefs, the group will often commit most of their time together to debating the 5% doctrine on which they disagree. I have seen people move across the country to fellowship with supposedly like-minded brethren times without number, only for the families to part ways in hostility shortly thereafter. Therefore, common doctrine alone is grossly insufficient to foster biblical unity.

The premise and foundation prescribed in this book (the healthy apostolic and historic DNA) is only as effective as our commitment to submit ourselves and humble ourselves to the full ramifications of compliance. It is powerful for developing the desired unity, but only with our willing cooperation.

So you may be wondering, in light of all that I have written, *what do I do now?* Some of you attend authoritarian hegemonies, some entertaining social clubs, and yet others leaderless home meetings. So where do you go from here?

My opinion on the matter, simply put, is just my opinion. But if you have read this far, you might value what I think. Historically, I have always erred on the side of unity. I have never advised someone to leave a church. I have always told church leaders who adopt this premise to start teaching and practicing rightly according to the principles herein, even the hard stuff, and watch the good and honest-hearted ones stand with you while others pull back and eventually away. Proceed with the good-hearted ones. And if your leaders or denominational organization asks you to leave, the faithful ones will follow you.

For the members, I always suggest going to your leaders and sharing with them the good things God has spoken to you and give them the opportunity to accept or reject the teachings. More importantly, make a personal commitment to doing the things Jesus said. Preach the kingdom, make disciples, pray and fast with the like-minded, and watch God move. A hot ember either lights the black around it or goes out itself; you will either light up the church or be snuffed out; or you may just be asked to leave. This has always been my position. I personally consider standing for the truth and obeying Christ literally as admirable and good. It is not us dividing; it is Christ and His truths that are separating.

Truthfully, organizations seldom change. It can happen, but in my experience training hundreds of pastors here in Kenya, it's very rare. Literal observance of the radical teachings of Jesus is as difficult to integrate into modern religion today as it was with the Jews during Jesus' public ministry. It's possible, but highly improbable. The historic faith is so foreign to the church system today that it is akin to putting new wine in old wineskins (though in reality, it's not *new* at all). It's really going back to the old, the historic faith,

“the faith that was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3). And going back to the historic faith, the historic practices, will yield the historic unity. As a result, we will see the historic fruitfulness both in quality and quantity of disciples. This I consider a priority.

During the writing of this book the Lord has urged and prompted me to consider my position. I am getting the sense and insight that we are living in a very unique and opportune time in history. I believe that we are about to experience a great revival in the not-too-distant future, and that it is time to wake the church, the sleeping giant, from its slumber and equip and mobilize the multitudes to reap the harvest. It is time to abandon rote religion and compromised cultural Christianity. It is time to completely abandon all allegiances to compromised *doctrinarity*, *churchianity*, and every tradition that is hindering this great, anticipated revival.

As a result, I ask every reader to pray in earnest and ask God what He wants you to do. Let Him tell you what He has made clear to me. Let Him show you that it is time to stop playing church and start getting serious for His work. It is time to end the social clubs and rather get in communion with Christ and one another. Let Him tell you that He has gifts for you, and expects you to use them. Let Him tell you that He desires to use you mightily to launch an unstoppable kingdom movement right where you are. Let Him activate and mobilize you. Let Him connect you with others who are fed up with ho-hum, get-nothing-done Christianity and form a group of saints who will surrender to His lordship. Let Him take you to places you have not seen, places you have only read about. Let Him do only what He can do.

However, don't forget that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. If God is calling you and directing you to embark on this journey, you are that prophet and maybe apostle. I urge you to be open to the Lord's leading. But I need to advise you that this journey is not for the faint-hearted. It takes resolve, perseverance, and commitment. You must know that it is the Lord leading you, and not your own ideas. Pray and fast with other mature brethren.

Remember that discipleship is meant to occur in the context of church, much like child-rearing is meant to occur in the context of the family. In this paradigm, you will be *de facto* parents for the new disciples. Therefore, you should have the requisite maturity and character. Seek counsel from mature brothers who know your strengths and weaknesses, gifts, and maturity. I understand that if a change of fellowship is being considered, your current church leadership may not be the best source of advice since they may have an inherent conflict of interest. But there should be others in your life that can bear witness to the Lord's hand in this move and speak to your personal character and readiness (or lack thereof).

This advice may appear on the surface to inspire division. That is not the intent in the least. The challenge is that itinerant workers and potential church planters are marginalized and suppressed in the existing church system. As a result, lots of kingdom work is left undone because the potential laborers are relinquished to holding down pews rather than stepping out of the nest so they can fly. Rescuing called and gifted laborers from the pews so that they can be sent out into the mission of the kingdom is righteous and noble. Trapping them in the Sunday-to-Sunday system is tragic. So many lost people are dying without an opportunity for salvation because the church system, by design, thwarts the work of the kingdom.

I don't view a stable church shedding itinerant workers as a church split; I view it as a church reproducing. Today churches want to grow and grow, and be big and fat. However, when an expectant mother grows large, it is only natural that she gives birth. It's not a tragedy that she shrinks a bit. Rather, it's an event worthy of celebration—a true miracle of God! In the same way, we should rejoice in the right type of church growth and reproduction.

I recall in scripture where Paul and Barnabas disagreed about bringing the young Mark with them on their second missionary journey. As a result, Paul went with Silas and Barnabas with Mark. Paul was now mature and could lead a mission team (contrary to popular opinion, Barnabas trained Paul, not the other way around). Barnabas went on to finish Mark's training. What appeared to be a bad thing, resulted in a greater good: four missionaries instead of two; two mission teams ministering at completely different locations. Their split resulted in twice as much kingdom work getting done, with twice the fruit. God was ultimately glorified.

If you are one of those chosen people ready to step out, I want to assist you. The journey you are choosing, I have traveled before you. I have written books about the journey the Lord has taken me on. But I also sense a call to assist innumerable saints like you who want to embark on the same journey. I am here.

It's time. *Now* is that time. Are you ready? Are you ready for *Christianity United: One Body in Christ*: united in mind, spirit, love, purpose in humility? Let's do this.

Epilogue

I have committed my life to the Lord's service. This journey has been an incredible adventure. Each advance was far beyond what I thought possible. A milestone in 2009 was a word the Lord gave me: *mobilize the saints for the end-time harvest*. Each step in my personal ministry journey has brought me closer to the fulfillment of that call.

It was in 2019, when I was planning my visit to America for a multi-state teaching tour, that I caught a glimpse of what this could look like. I knew while teaching all over the US that everything that God had done in me and through me, and through our mission, had occurred for a singular purpose: to equip others to do the same.

Months after returning to Africa following our US tour, brethren from one of the stateside meetings abruptly and unexpectedly visited me and dropped a bombshell: they decided to gift our mission with a property consisting of a bible college and duplex house (as well as a Landrover and motorcycle). It came as a complete surprise. However, it was also the fulfillment of a vision given way back in 2014 for an international discipleship school. We came to terms on our future partnership for a school enterprise and completed the transaction. The final renovations of the property are underway as I write this.

Our first class was planned in April at our small, local facility, to give the curriculum a test run with our own people first. But the Covid-19 crisis and subsequent restrictions derailed everything (or so I thought).

With the complete cancellation of all of our core mission activities—no evangelism, no church services, no prayer meetings, no fasting meetings, no mid-week meetings—we found that the incredible unity and common purpose we had built over the years was at risk of faltering. In order to preempt any compromise in the strength of our mission, we instituted distance teachings. Our regular messages and communication have kept everyone connected, in the mind, and in the Word.

Though this little development is a baby step, what it has revealed is that our leadership team here in Kenya (apostles, prophets, and teachers) can actually support distance fellowships, like at no other time in history. Through many multimedia platforms, connectedness is now possible anywhere in the world. This is truly revolutionary.

However, launching a kingdom movement can't all be done through long-distance communication. Evangelism, healing, deliverance, fasting, and prayer must be both taught *and* demonstrated. Enter the discipleship school. Through hands-on field training, students can be personally equipped and prepared to do the very things discussed not only in this book, but in the prior books in this series. Following the training, our team can continue to support church-planting efforts with wisdom, counsel, teachings, and prayer. This is what I envision as the fulfillment of my call to *mobilize the saints for the end-time harvest*. You are invited to join us in this great adventure.

God bless you.
Brother Marc

About Wajumbe Training Center

Details provided here are subject to change as we move forward and learn from our experiences. For now, this is what we envision.

Wajumbe Training Center, an outreach ministry of Kingdom Driven Ministries, is a short-term, full-time, discipleship training boot-camp designed to inspire, inform, equip, and mobilize ministers in all aspects of field ministry and church planting and development. *Wajumbe* means “messengers” in Swahili, and refers to the itinerant field ministries of apostle (modern equivalent to missionary), evangelist, and teacher. These roles are the most often neglected in the pastor- and Sunday-service centric ministries of today. However, these roles served an indispensable part in the efficacy and vitality of the early church and are still needed more than ever today.

The best description of the material that will be presented is biblical and apostolic, or early church. It can be further articulated as both “kingdom” and “charismatic.” Kingdom, first and foremost, refers to the supremacy of adhering to the literal teachings of Jesus Christ. Charismatic means believing in and operating in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Both of these attributes are presented in the New Testament and likewise the first couple hundred years of the post-Apostolic, or Ante-Nicene (pre-325 AD) church. These two descriptors accurately describe the genre of the materials taught and practically modeled in the training.

Since in discipleship *more is caught than taught*, the training will not simply be an intellectual download. Yes, theology, from a distinctly kingdom perspective, will be taught. Teachers and evangelists certainly need this requisite foundation. However, the instructors, who are all experienced field evangelists and teachers, will also demonstrate and model all vital aspects of field ministry. For this reason, class size will be limited, so that field operations may be simulated through drill and practice and teams will actually be able to venture into the field.

Beyond doctrine, the course emphasizes New Testament practices as best practices for fruitful kingdom expansion. Some examples include: going out in pairs preaching the kingdom, healing the sick, and expelling demons; making disciples; baptizing them and teaching them to obey Jesus; establishing fellowships that meet in private homes; a Spirit-led interactive service; every saint a soldier on the mission; complete and total surrender to the Lord’s service; unity of mind, spirit, love, and purpose, all in humility.

Author of the Course

Marc Carrier is a missionary serving in Kenya since 2012. He pioneered the mission known as Kingdom Driven Ministry from nothing to now numerous churches and hundreds of kingdom disciples. He has taught in local Kenyan Bible colleges and trained hundreds of pastors in practical ministry during short-term seminars. He is the author of many books, including *Pioneering the Kingdom: Experiences Applying the Apostolic Pattern for a Sustainable and Reproducible Mission*, *Christianity Unleashed: Slaves to Soldiers*, and *Christianity Advanced: The Next Level*. For a sampling of Marc’s teachings or to freely download those books and others, visit KingdomDriven.org, LivetheBible.info, or look up Kingdom Driven Ministries on Youtube.

Course Description

Classes will meet daily Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 5 PM at our facility in Matunda, Mois Bridge (half way between Kitale and Eldoret, Kenya) for three weeks. Local students may go home for the weekend on Friday afternoon and return Sunday afternoon at their own expense.

Practical breakout sessions will accompany classroom lecture. Practical sessions will include preaching the kingdom, healing, deliverance, taking someone through repentance, baptism, communion, foot washing, field evangelism, all-night prayer meeting, fasting, discovery bible study, and church discipline. Evenings will give students an opportunity to unwind, review notes, and do drill and practice with a partner. Students will finish the course with a written exam and three practical sessions: preaching the kingdom, healing the sick, and deliverance. Passing students will receive a certificate of achievement (not officially accredited).

Accommodations

Three simple meals will be provided each day, including on weekends for students who remain at the facility. Comfortable bunk beds in a gender-specific group setting with linens and mosquito nets will be provided. Gender-specific outdoor bathrooms (for bathing) and toilets are available for students. Students are asked to bring towels, toothbrushes, and other personal hygiene products. Soap and basins will be provided for bathing.

Limited Western accommodations are available for foreign visitors. These include a flushing, sit-down toilet; a hot shower; a private shared room (bunk beds); and a more diverse meal menu.

Tuition

The proposed tuition for locals is 2,000 Kenya Shillings. This includes books, meals, and accommodations. Scholarships may be available. Students are responsible for all transportation costs to and from the facility.

The proposed tuition for foreigners choosing the limited Western accommodations is \$300 (USA dollars). This includes books, more private Western accommodations, and a more diverse meal menu. Students are responsible for all travel and transportation expenses. Students may fly into Eldoret International Airport or Kitale Airstrip.

KINGDOM DRIVEN ministries



**Fulfilling the GREAT COMMISSION and the
GREAT COMMANDMENT in East Africa**

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all
the nations, baptizing them in the name
of the Father and the Son and the Holy
Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I
commanded you”**

(Matthew 28:19-20)



Making Disciples



*Expanding the
Kingdom of God*



*Home
Fellowship*



*Developing Indigenous
Leaders*



The Carrier Family

**“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF”**

(From Matthew 22:36-40; see also Matthew
25:31-46)



Vital aid for the poor:

- ◆ Job skills and Education
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Funerals
- ◆ Employment



*Medical Assistance
for the poor*



*Food for the poor and
malnourished*



Glenn Roseberry

www.KingdomDriven.org