

CHURCH STRUCTURE

THE WAY FATHER PLANNED IT!

Believers in the Lord Jesus who are not involved in traditional routine church activities are sometimes described as being a 'Phantom Church' —and seen to be part of a vague, nondescript and motley bunch of undisciplined, misguided and rebellious misfits. Some folk who have been their friends and yoke-fellows in the past now find it difficult to understand the change that has taken place in these followers of Christ. At times they even perceive them to be a personal threat in some way or other.

We suspect that at the same time some (who are mystified by this world-wide phenomena of apparently vibrantly alive Christians not being involved in church as they understand it) are disturbed by an inner niggling awareness that this just may be the purpose of God for His people today. This should not be seen as a new 'Movement', however, but as a further part of the moving of God towards His ultimate intention for the Bride of Christ.

We have been told on a number of occasions that there simply must be some kind of structure to the Christian Church. Indeed so! This is an endeavour to clarify Father's provision for structure, and to compare it with the methods of men.

This is especially being written to bring understanding to brothers and sisters who have already abandoned man-made church structures. At the same time we want to bring a challenge to such folk lest they sit back smugly waiting for others to 'catch up' to where they now are. We must press on! The surest way to see others entering into what has become precious and meaningful to us is for each of us to be taking further steps in following the Master.

CUSTOMARY CHURCH STRUCTURE

Let us first look at this on the basis of what is usual in organized church structures, considering the challenge of being called to live free from this bondage. Not every aspect of what we share will necessarily be found in every specific church structure, but some most assuredly will.

In church organizations structure is the application of the authority of leaders and laws for the purpose of controlling, restricting and directing so as to bring gain to the organization and its leadership, as well as to promote their perceived purposes and goals. In other words, there is self serving selfishness involved.

This 'official' structural authority is exercised through human control with a blending of manipulation and domination. Money (tithing and the accumulation of church funds) and customs, sentiment and fear, acceptance and rejection, and the claim to speak and act on God's behalf and with 'official' divine authority are all used to keep leaders in a false place of control, and to further the cause of man-initiated programmes in sub-standard churchdom.

These practices also result in keeping members in a place of dependence on their leaders and their church systems, thereby depriving them of true freedom to respond to the Holy Spirit in every aspect of life. This obviously hinders folk from attaining full maturity and from the capacity for clear consistent understanding of God's purposes for their personal lives.

STRUCTURE DANGERS

Here are samples of church organizational structures:

| | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| God | God |
| Jesus is Lord | Jesus is Lord |
| Pope, Denom, Leader | Pastor & or Elders |
| Local Leaders | Sheep or Member |

Members or Sheep

Such organizational structures involve many dangers, and we shall consider some of them.

BOTTLE-NECKS

At different levels one person or an exclusive small group of leaders become a bottle-neck in the life of a 'church'. They become the deciders of what is acceptable, of what activities should be undertaken, and of what should be done with money and property. At times lip service is paid to the right of all members to a voice in such matters but this is flawed by the intrusion of church 'politics' and the dominance of strong leaders and charismatic personalities.

SPIRITUAL INFERIORITY COMPLEXES

Tragically, multitudes of sincere Christians have developed spiritual inferiority complexes because this kind of church system is based on the false concept that leaders have more spiritual authority and spiritual development possibilities than mere members.

Linked with this is the clearly imparted (though probably almost never overtly, verbally taught) understanding that leaders can 'hear' God more clearly than others. Some of us have been shocked when coming to a place of realisation that leadership in such a system has unwittingly caused us to be a middle-man (mediator) between God and man. I suspect that virtually all church 'counselling is based on this falsehood.

CONFORMITY IS REQUIRED

So that everything runs smoothly in a church organization, acceptability tends to be measured by conformity. Erroneously, many folk think that corporate strength lies in uniformity of belief, activity, and acceptance of whatever a leader declares or desires.

A God of infinite variety finds no pleasure in man-made church 'clones'. Rather than have men mould us into their image we need to be yielded to the Holy Spirit so that He can mould us into the unique aspect of the likeness to the Lord Jesus that Father has chosen for us.

IS JESUS LORD?

Every follower of the Lord Jesus, and every group that considers itself a part of His church, doubtlessly at least pays lip service to the declaration that JESUS IS LORD, and usually are quite sincere and devout in their assertion. However, this statement can — and does — mean different things to different people.

There is a vast difference, for example, in seeing the Lord Jesus as titular sovereign of His realm in a way similar to the Queen of England in hers, compared with seeing Him as a combination of the Prime Minister, Cabinet, and Parliament of Great Britain. The Queen holds a place of high honour and loving esteem, but has virtually no authority to levy taxes, affect the direction of the nation, or to involve herself in decisions which Government makes.

To use a different picture, some may see Jesus as a virtual absentee honorific Chairman of the Board, while others see Him as a 'Hands On' General Manager of the Company.

FALSE POSSESSIVENESS

Because of the nature of these kinds of church structures it has become normal for varying degrees of authority to control church members and church activities to be given to, or assumed by, individual leaders. Among such leaders such terms as "My church" "My people" and "My sheep" are in common usage. Sometimes "My disciple/s" is used as well, as leaders claim from their followers the loyalty which should be reserved for the Lord Jesus alone.

Little wonder that the Lord wants to execute a coup d'etat, regain control of His church and 'run it' Himself, as a brother that we know and honour prophesied on one occasion!

Little wonder either, that those involved in that kind of leadership struggle to maintain pure, selfless and Christlike motivation in what they consider to be their service for Christ.

The kind of church structure that we have described thus far fosters and breeds impure motivation which manifests itself in improper possessiveness, carnal ambition and schismatic rivalry.

SUMMARY

To Summarise what has been stated thus far.

1. THE PURPOSE OF HUMAN ORGANIZATIONAL

Structure is to apply authority through leaders and laws so that the activity of members is controlled, restricted and directed towards goals that leaders set for the progress of ‘their’ work.

2. THE NATURE OF HUMAN ORGANIZATIONAL

Structure is manipulation and domination through money and property, doctrine and behavioural requirements, traditions and customs, sentiment and fear, acceptance and rejection, and the claim of leaders to speak and act on God’s behalf — supposedly with (official) divine authority.

3. THE EFFECTS OF HUMAN ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE are:

- (a) Keeping members in a place of dependence on their leaders and church.
- (b) Leaders become ‘bottle-necks’ to God’s purposes and grace, since in effect many things can only be done by their decision and with their approval.
- (c) Many lovely believers have deep spiritual inferiority complexes blinding them to the fact that nobody can hear God more clearly than they can — especially in what Father desires of them.
- (d) Conformity to and uniformity with church standards are falsely accepted as the norm for the Christian church.
- (e) Motivation of leaders primarily, and of followers secondarily, tends to draw them away from pure devotion to Jesus and from desire for Him alone to be glorified. The ‘system’ has tended to draw leaders towards possessive selfishness, carnal ambition, schismatic rivalry and internal conflicts.

Let none who tell us that the church of Jesus Christ must have some structure dare have structure of this sort in mind. We will not have it. While gladly acknowledging that there are ever so many sincere, godly and blessed-of-God believers involved in the life and leadership of humanly organized and controlled churches, we testify with thankfulness and humility that by His sovereign grace God has set us free. We are free indeed, but not free to be “laid back” and indolent. Rather we are free from “*purpose or activity that is of human origin*” (Acts 5:38, 39 NIV).

Our desire is not to be ‘laid back’ but freely ‘laid down’ in glad yieldedness to every purpose and challenge that God has for us. We are not free to have or do anything our way, but free to freely respond to every clear prompting of the Holy Spirit, and are committed to do so.

MAY GOD’S WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN FOR HIS SAKE!

SIMPLY SUPERIOR

Whatever God initiates not only has an excellence to it but often also has a delightful simplicity as well. Surely this is so that the simplest of His children may not be deprived of the riches of His grace, and also so that our love focus will continue to be on our dear Lord Jesus Himself.

The structure that Father purposes for His church on earth is certainly marked by excellence and simplicity as well as being of a much higher order than could be conceived by the natural mind. Although there are practical “down to earth” implications and consequences to this structure, it is essentially in a higher realm — the realm of the Spirit — and in the spiritual dimension of life.

This living, spiritual structure exists so that the Holy Spirit can control, direct, equip and release the children of God, allowing the life of Christ to flow through them.

CONTROLLING FACTORS IN SPIRITUAL STRUCTURES

The primary controlling factor for us is centred in **GOD’S WONDERFULLY ACTIVE LOVE towards us, and in OUR ENJOYING THE PERPETUAL FRESHNESS OF A VIBRANT AND INTIMATE LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS.**

Only this provides an adequate, spiritually healthy and God glorifying motivation for Christian living. “*Christ’s love compels us,*” Paul declared in 2 Corinthians 5:14, as he shared the secret of his faithfulness to his God given task. Compared with this, how tawdry is the motivation of a sense

of duty, loyalty, obligation, or commitment to a leader, doctrine or system.

Another controlling factor for us must be the **UNEQUIVOCAL AND UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT OF EACH BELIEVER TO DAILY WALK - WITH A WHOLEHEARTED AND ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT - IN THE LORD'S UNIQUE WILL FOR THEIR LIFE.** He still calls each of His followers to deny self, take up their cross and follow HIM. In Luke 9:24 Jesus adds, "*Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*"

One of the travesties of Christian life today is that too many will follow Christ as long as it doesn't cost too much, and as long as they can retain control of some sectors of their lives. Jesus clearly taught that because of this such people are not fully alive. Seeking to escape the cost of taking up their cross to follow Jesus they eliminate the possibility of knowing experientially the glorious blessing of resurrection living.

A third and obvious aspect of the controlling, co-ordinating activity of the Holy Spirit in spiritual structure involves **EVERY BELIEVER BEING COMMITTED AND EAGER TO HEAR AND RESPOND TO THE 'VOICE' OF THE SPIRIT.** We need to walk continuously with clear and consistent awareness and recognition of His inner promptings. This must be coupled with unreserved willingness to respond promptly and fully to His desires regardless of any possible consequences.

In this matter we must be gladly willing to move beyond the boundaries of currently defined and accepted orthodoxy, to break old norms, and to enter new and virgin territory in God's plans and purposes for us and for all of His people on earth today.

A FULLY FUNCTIONING BODY

As we each one set ourselves to walk in love with Jesus and to hear and respond to the Holy Spirit, so, consequently, the function of each member should result in the operation of every God given gifting and ministry, with purity and fullness. Only when men's hands are taken off the Ark, and when the Lord Himself controls and co-ordinates the lives and activities of His people can there ever be a fully functioning, God

glorifying church on earth today. Under the full control of the Holy Spirit, living stones will be built into a dwelling place (temple) for the Lord. This structure will be erected by the Lord and not by men.

“Just as we have born the likeness of the earthly man” by following the ways of men, “So shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven” by following the ways of Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit. He deserves to have that kind of Church!

“The way Father planned it” is included in the title of this article to emphasise that with a truly spiritual structure we are able to be like one big happy family. Church structures that originate in the minds of men strive unavailingly to turn the church into an army (with leaders as military officers, of course!) which Father never desired or requested. ***“You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy towards each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds.”***

I Peter 3:18 (Living Bible)

STRUCTURAL SIMPLICITY

An organizational chart for God’s kind of church structure would look like this:

GOD

JESUS IS LORD

EVERY MEMBER OF CHRIST’S BODY

* In his book “The One Body of Christ” Kurosaki writes, “Each member of the Body is connected DIRECTLY to the Head.” Malcom Smith in his excellent book, “Spiritual Burnout” states that, “You cannot have an English head and a French body, and nor can you have a millionaire head and a pauper’s body.”

When every member functions out of reality and realization of being connected directly to the head of the Church (rather than on the basis of human choice and ability) he will have a radiant body commensurate with His majesty. * see last page.

When our life styles are radically affected by the outworking of this mysterious yet glorious connection we ALL can and should be irrefutable living evidence of the following aspects of New Testament life:

1. RADICALLY FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Early church believers were ALL filled with the Holy spirit, declared the wonders of God in foreign tongues, and shared the revelation of God boldly. [See Acts 2:4, 2:11,2:17, 4:31]

Nowadays many of the Christians who profess to be filled with the Holy spirit show scant evidence of the fire, love, purity, faith, and power that early church believers manifested. May God in mercy grant to His church again in our day the true fullness of His Spirit so that every part of our being and living are wonderfully affected. May His followers again overflow with the fullness of His redemptive provision for them so that the multitudes of unbelievers will reach out **to** Him for saving grace.

2. OVERFLOWING WITNESSES

Jesus Himself informed His followers that they would ALL be His witnesses. Peter confirmed that they were. They shared the Good News boldly. [See Acts 1:8,2:32,4:31]. Boldness does not necessarily mean absence of fear, (though we certainly should be free of the kind of fear which has torment) but it does mean proceeding to gladly and forthrightly do what we are called to do, regardless of personal feeling. Even brave and heroic soldiers, mountain rescue team members and life boat crews have acknowledged at times that they were afraid. But it wasn't a crippling fear hindering the successful accomplishment of their tasks. Being aware of our personal inadequacy can be valuable if it causes us, as it should, to cling closely to the Lord, drawing on His abundant grace.

How delightful the declaration of Peter and John before the Jewish Leadership, "*We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:20) Living in the true fullness of the Spirit's power should bring us **to** a place of eager willingness to share with precious lost people the wonders of God's grace and the depths of His great love for ungodly people.

3. AMAZING HARMONY

"ALL the believers were one in heart and mind." (Acts 4:32) None of them clung tenaciously **to** whatever possessions Father had entrusted to them. They were willing to share what they had with others, holding nothing back.

How very wonderful to be in a situation where every believer without exception is filled with love, and united with everyone else in Father's family, in deep desire for Him **to** be pre-eminent and glorified in every way in everything. What a day it will be when nothing of behind-the-back gossiping, carping criticism or carnal slandering can be found anywhere among Jesus' followers.

Paul made very clear to the Christians at Philippi that their (inner heart) attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Jesus did not grasp for his 'rights and privileges', but willingly humbled Himself to the lowest place. His attitude of loving and committed allegiance to His Father, and to His Father's will was unwavering even though it resulted in death on a cross. "Be like that", Paul exhorts. The blessed Holy Spirit seeks to bring about God's purpose for us that we be conformed to the likeness of the Lord Jesus. Earth needs to see the reality of that! More specifically, so also do our family, neighbours, and work associates need **to** see that same selfless, Christlike attitude evident in us.

**In the early church Spirit controlled believers
were Christ like believers, one in heart and mind.**

4. EVER SO AMAZING GRACE

Acts 4:33 declares that "*Much grace was upon them ALL*". this means that in the early church every believer experienced the active, loving favour and mercy of God in their lives. Think of that. What a way to live! It is far superior to an endless striving to maintain the dubious favour of man-appointed church officials, isn't it?

Paul personally testified, "*The Lord said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*" He didn't feel pressured **to** put on a show of being devout, capable, strong, gifted, and very adequate for all of life's challenges. Rather the reverse! Paul freely boasted of his weaknesses. He had no desire to accomplish humanistically on the basis of his natural strength, wisdom, charisma or ability.

To know Christ's power resting on oneself because of God's amazing grace to assure that whatever the Holy Spirit accomplishes through us will last for ever and will glorify the Lord wonderfully. It will also mean that earth is privileged to see God's best in the church, rather than man's best — which is very sub-standard and unsatisfying.

Repeatedly the Scripture declares that God opposes proud people but gives grace to those who are humble. Away with our false sense of importance and pride in personal achievements — even (or especially) with regard to church life and Christian living! Let us give supreme priority in our daily living to the challenge, simplicity and wonder of walking humbly with our God, (Micah 6:8), loving our Lord Jesus, and responding **to** the Holy Spirit without question or quibble.

“The good man walks along in the ever-brightening light of God’s favour; the dawn gives way to morning splendour.” Proverbs 4:18 (Living Bible)

5. JUST ONE BOSS!

Acts 10:36 **“JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF ALL”**. This seems to be a clear and simple statement and it is often made today in prayer, song and declaration. However, it is the challenge of a lifetime to live in the reality and fullness of it. Is the Lord Jesus actually Lord of our time, our money and our possessions, our work and our leisure, our abilities and our weaknesses, our family and our friendships, our thoughts and our speech, and our attitudes and desires?

‘Lord’ means BOSS. Jesus as Lord retains to Himself the right to ‘call the shots’ in every area of our lives. We will never know how deep and lasting fulfilment until we joyfully and totally accede to the claims of His Lordship. No man or organization, sentiment or obligation, should ever be allowed to infringe or violate the place that the Lord Jesus deserves in our lives.

Jesus Christ must be acknowledged as **LORD OF ALL** in the church. He declared that He would build His church, and He will. Whatever man builds will soon pass away, and is already being shaken. There is much more of this shaking ahead in the immediate future. By contrast, what God builds will last for ever. Any part of activity, goals, ideals and church organization that originates with men - even good intentioned men - is doomed to die, and less than futile.

In Isaiah 31 we learn that in a time of slaughter, towers (structures of men) will fall. Streams of water will flow from every high mountain and lofty hill (what God has raised up unaided). **IT IS DANGEROUS TO REMAIN IN A STRUCTURE OF MAN’S MAKING!**

CLARIFYING THE CHOICE

In “Revelatory Adventure”^{*} I comment that the Lord Jesus sees structured churchdom as a rival, falsely claiming the right **to** portions of our time, devotion, activity, finances, and allegiance. He has the right **to** use, direct, reserve or discard any and every part of all that we have and are. He IS Lord of all!

CONSIDER THE ISSUE OF CONTROL, noting the following verses: Romans 8:6 *“The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”*

Ephesians 5:18 (Wuest) *“... Be constantly controlled by the Spirit.”* Every believer should gladly accept the control of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and refuse to be controlled by the dictates of sub-standard churchdom. At any and every point where there is ‘conflict of interest’ we should immediately yield to the control of the Spirit. We must obey God rather than men!

CONSIDER THE ISSUE OF COMPULSION in Paul’s statement in Acts 20:22 *“And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.”* Never allow yourself to be trapped in a situation where you feel that you must do or not do what man or custom dictates to you, even though that would be the easiest course of action. Let the Spirit compel, let the love of Christ compel, but refuse to allow church structure or leadership to compel.

CONSIDER THE ISSUE OF LEADING: Romans 8:14 *“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”* Galatians 5:18 *“if you are led by the Spirit you are not under law.”*

see last page.

Some church officials claim the right to lead ‘their flock’. After all, aren’t they leaders? We are Christ’s sheep. He does give some men shepherding responsibilities such as being servants (who are to watch over us even as they do their own souls), and as being examples of the flock of God. (Not their flock, please note!). But the leading they are called to perform is in setting examples of love, humility, purity and godliness.

Take care that you let the Holy Spirit lead in every part of your life. This will be challenging, at times a bit scary, but wonderfully adventurous. It will be fulfilling to you and pleasing **to** God. The choice is

plain: either be Spirit led or church system bled! Brother, sister, “*Since we live by the Spirit let us keep in step with the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:25). To keep in step with Him will at times mean that we are out of step with fellow Christians that we love and admire. But we won’t help them by yielding to their timetable, programme, and structural demands. Our keeping in step with the Spirit will be a challenge and an example to some who haven’t yet heard what we have heard and who haven’t yet seen what we have seen, so obviously cannot yet walk where we are walking. They may well hear, see and follow because of the consistency of our walk in the Spirit.

SUMMARY

To summarise what has been stated regarding “**Church structure the way the Father planned it**” let us see that in contrast to customary church structure this higher way involves structure in the spiritual dimension of life.

1. **THE PURPOSE OF FATHER’S KIND OF STRUCTURE** is to bring us all to a place where we freely and wholeheartedly respond to the Holy Spirit so that He is able to cause every believer to live as He intends. This is so that Christ may be the focus of our love, the Lord of our lives, and the Builder of His church. His purpose is also to knit us together like one big happy family, accepting no divisions or brand names, and allowing brothers and sisters to have differing perspectives and practices.
2. **THE NATURE OF FATHER’S KIND OF CHURCH STRUCTURE** involves our hearts being wholly His, evidenced by:
 - (a) Our responding to His incomparable love by maintaining the perpetual freshness of a vibrant, intimate love relationship with the Lord Jesus.
 - (b) The unequivocal and unconditional commitment of every believer **to** walk daily (with a wholehearted and adventurous spirit) in the Lord’s unique will for each of their lives.
 - (c) Every believer being eager to hear and respond to the ‘voice’ of the Holy Spirit as He speaks into the practicalities of their daily living.
3. **THE RESULTS OF FATHER’S KIND OF STRUCTURE** is that optimum value will be gained from each member of His Body being linked to the Head directly. So shall we ALL be compelled, controlled and

led by the Holy Spirit, keeping in step with Him. We shall ALL experience His fullness, rejoice in His grace, witness **to** his love, and with one heart and mind acknowledge that to each of us and in each of us, Jesus is Lord of all.

When we were last in England we were questioned by a brother that we love and respect. He had just been away for a few days in a gathering of men well known as leaders in Renewal and Restoration in England. "Have you noticed that there is a new interest in Revival in this country, and a call to pray for it?" "Yes," we replied, "We have observed it, and thank God for it." When the brother asked, "Do you know why?" I admitted that I didn't, and asked him to explain it to me. His explanation was most revealing. He told us that about twenty five years ago many of them had come into new freedom in worship, new appreciation of Christian relationships and new experiences of spiritual gifts and ministries. In those early days of renewal they had felt that now they had adequate understanding and ability to accomplish the work of God to the extent that God's kingdom would come to England.

After earnest effort over a half of their adult lifetimes they now saw that the church still fell abysmally short of God's highest intentions for this day. So now they pray for Revival, asking God to do sovereignly what neither they nor we can accomplish humanistically.

"Now unto Him who is able to do immeasurably more according to His power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen."

* Referred to on page 8.

Now published as "Let's RETURN to Christian UNITY."... ..
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