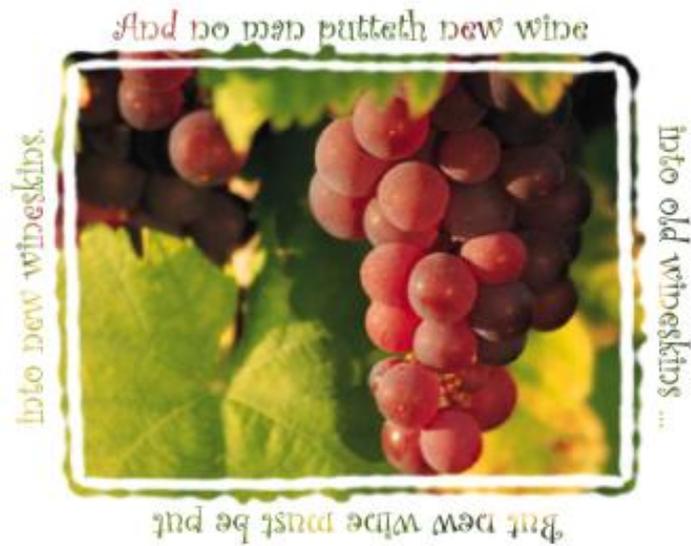


His Church

A study on the New Testament Church



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His Church

What is a biblical church?

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(This edition of 'His Church' has been considerably added to since it was last proof read for me. Any spelling and grammar errors are therefore mine, not an oversight on the part of my proofreader! - *Rick* - September 2003)



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Introduction

*“And no man putteth new wine into old bottles;
else the new wine doth burst the bottles,
and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred;
but new wine must be put into new bottles.”*

Mark 2:22

‘Bottles’ in the above quotation is referring to the old leather type, otherwise known as wineskins. These were once used to produce and store wine in. The science is simple – the freshly trodden grape juice is mixed with a little yeast and poured into the new wineskin. The fermentation process takes its course producing gasses that expand the supple container. Put this new wine into a skin which has been used before and both the contents and its container are wasted.

The spiritual principle here can firstly be applied to the individual’s need of being made into a completely new creation in Christ in order to be a fit vessel for God’s life within. However, the life of Christ is not only placed in individual human hearts, but God has also chosen to manifest His presence in this world through the Body of people which is known as His Church. It should not be surprising then to see that, along with the many other revelations of Scripture, God’s Word contains an abundance of references to the nature and order of the container of His own precious life.

The following study is an overview of the ‘outward shell’ of church-life based upon the New Testament teachings. There are many profound and deeply spiritual ways that one could approach the subject of His Church, the very life-blood of Christ, the new wine, runs through this company, but here the focus is mainly upon the ‘wineskin’. This study follows a simple progression of thought seeking to answer, from Scripture, some basic questions on the pattern for the New Testament Church. This is a Bible study and as such is ideally intended to be read in order and digested slowly. Search the Scriptures to see whether these things be so. It may be helpful to start by reading Appendix 1 – *‘Inspiration of Scripture’*. Everything within this study is based upon the premise that God has preserved in His Word a pattern for all churches in all places at all times.

Important Note

In the New Testament the Church is revealed in two ways:

1. The *One*, **‘Universal Church’** (meaning worldwide). The specific biblical term for this is really the *One Body*: **“*There is one body ...*”** (Eph. 4:4); **“*For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body ...*”** (1 Cor. 12:13). In this study this is referred to as: *Church* (capital ‘C’), *The Church & The Universal Church*.
2. The **‘local churches’**. That is the separate gatherings of God’s people in various locations around the world. These are referred to as: *church* (small ‘c’), *the churches*, *local church*, also as *congregation*, *fellowship* or *assembly*. These terms are all used interchangeably simply for variety.

The 'Church' and the 'churches'

What is the Church?

The word 'church' appears seventy-seven times in the Inspired Scriptures and thirty five times in its plural form 'churches'. With only one exception, each time the word *church(es)* occurs it is translating the same one Greek word – 'EKKLESIA'. EKKLESIA is also translated on three occasions as 'assembly'.

The one exception where the word 'church' is used but the Greek word in the original texts is not EKKLESIA is in Acts 19:37. Here we find the phrase "**robbers of churches**" (Authorised Version of the Bible). On this occasion an entirely different Greek word is used [HIEROSULOS], and it is referring to the '*despoiling of temples*', that is, the ransacking of buildings especially set apart for religious use.

The word EKKLESIA, on the other hand, in no way at all implies anything to do with buildings of any kind, or any type of place dedicated for religious purposes. Its meaning is – '*an assembly*', with an underlying meaning of – '*separated*', that is – '*a body called out*'. If God were to *call-out*, or *separate* a group of people for Himself for some special purpose this would be an EKKLESIA. This is exactly what God has done. The churches, which received apostolic letters, were addressed as – "**called**", "**chosen**" and "**sanctified**" (set apart).

Called *from* what *to* what? This is perhaps best simply expressed in these words written in 1 Pet 2:9-10:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar (purchased) people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in times past were not a people, but are now the people of God."

Peter goes on to talk about our being strangers (foreigners) and pilgrims (people just passing through on a journey).

If God is our Father, if we have been born from above, if the life that is in us is a heavenly life (as opposed to an entirely earthly one) then we do not belong to this world, we are in it but not of it - we are the EKKLESIA. The word CHURCH has nothing to do with any earthly place or building, it is simply the collective term for all of the people of God. We are the Church.

What are the churches?

The *Church* (Universal) can be simply defined as the worldwide body of believers at all times and in all places. Interestingly, many of its members are not on earth today but are alive in Heaven. Bodily death does not forfeit one's membership. The *churches* (local) on the other hand, refer to much smaller groups of believers gathering together in a given locality. They are limited by their geographical location, reduced in number when their members die (though new members may be added) and unable to singularly contain every gift and ministry that God has given to the wider Church. Also, we see in Scripture that it was not necessary to have any 'office' filled in order to qualify as a church. (See glossary for notes on the words 'ministry' and 'office').

A good illustration of this last point is found in the book of Acts: when Paul and Barnabas founded churches in Asia Minor, it was not until some considerable time later that Paul returned to these churches and elders were appointed. The estimated time gap between these churches being founded and Paul's return visit is up to two years (read Acts 14 along with a good commentary in order to gain some understanding of the time lapse in this period). The Bible does not mention any special offices being in operation in those churches during the intervening period, yet they were still considered to be churches.

This is not to say that churches do not need elders, at some stage in their development they do, but it is not the fulfilment of special offices either that legitimises a church. It is the gathering together of the believers that constitutes a church. Jesus promises to be ***"in the midst"*** when just two or three are gathered in His name (Mat. 18:20). This does not mean that every gathering of Christians for fellowship is a church. However, if needs be, it would be sufficient to qualify as such (albeit an undeveloped one) if those gathering were seeking to fulfil the role of a church under God's leading. The local gatherings of such people are the churches.

Was there a Church in the Old Testament?

Before we move on to give fuller consideration to the elements and functions of the Church in the New Testament era, we need to deal briefly with this question. There is a difference between the order of things under the Old Covenant and the specific order of things under the New. To understand the answer to this question we must first of all believe the inspired word of the Bible and secondly, rid ourselves of any preconceived notions of what the word 'Church' means, remember, it simply means 'a body called out'.

The answer then, is quite simply yes; there was a Church in the Old Testament. Stephen, recounting Israel's history, mentions ***"the Church in the wilderness"*** in the days of Moses (Acts 7:38). The New King James version uses the word 'congregation' in this instance; it is the same Greek word - EKKLESIA. When God formed Israel into a nation under Moses' leadership the whole assemblage was referred to as an EKKLESIA. In fact, according to Paul in 1 Cor. 10:2 ***"they were all baptised unto Moses...."*** So we see in this great man Moses, a wonderful pre-figuring of Christ. It is by our baptism (complete immersion) into Christ (not water) that we become a part of *His nation*. Interestingly, the people were referred to as being a ***"mixed multitude"***, that is, not all of them that came out with Moses from Egypt were physical descendants of Jacob. The Church of the Old Testament comprised both Jew and Gentile proselytes.

Israel was *called-out* from Egypt and *called-to* the land of promise; they were to be different, set apart, from all the other nations around them. Israel's repeated sin was their desire to be like the other nations around them. This is certainly a warning to the Church in the New Testament era. We are commanded by God, as they were, not to conform to worldly views and modes of behaviour. Rather, we are instructed that our way of thinking must be transformed, that is, that we should have a completely new way of thinking and behaving ***"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"*** (Rom. 12:2). We should not model ourselves according to the methods of an ever-changing world around us. All the fashions of this world are going to pass away. God's Church should see, believe and conform to the pattern that He has given us that is preserved in Scripture.

The Church of the Old Testament was of a very specific order. God gave to Moses verbatim instructions on all His requirements encompassing the law, ceremony and buildings (i.e. the

tabernacle and all its utensils). Everything was to be followed to the strictest letter. This special people had a special calling from God. Their task was to provide a framework of moral, religious and civil authority, which would be the backdrop into which the Messiah would be born, so that, when he came and talked about sin, this people would have an inherent understanding of what was meant by the term 'sin'. When He spoke about redemption or sacrifice, people in that setting would have had some understanding of what these things meant.

We cannot in this study look at all of Israel's purposes and blessings, failures and cursings during Old Testament history; suffice it to say that there was most certainly an EKKLESIA throughout the Old Covenant era. In the broader picture, it would be true to say that such a group existed before the days of Moses, if we were to include all those individuals who were set apart by God in a special way such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and all those like them. From before the foundation of the world God, knowing all things, always had it in His heart to choose a people especially for Himself. Thus, throughout history and still today there have always been those who have heard God calling to them – "Come apart, be separate, be mine," - ***"I will be your God and you will be my people."***

Membership of the Church

Now we shall move on from that very broad history of God's special people, both before and under the Old Covenant, and from this point forward consider specifically this whole subject in relation to the Church of the New Testament age which had its beginning on the day of Pentecost nearly 2000 years ago.

So how does somebody become a member of God's Church today? Once again the answer can be found only in Scripture. In the New Testament the Church has various analogous types; for example it is called a Body, a Bride, and a Building. Let us take just the first one: the Church is like a Body. Paul writes, ***"for as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many"*** (1 Cor.12: 12-14). We are told in Eph. 4 that there is ***"one body, one Spirit, and one baptism."***

Note: Immersion into water is the accompanying demonstration of the 'one' spiritual baptism not the means by which we enter into union with Christ or His Church.

We automatically become members of God's Church when we receive that 'one baptism' in the Spirit of God. The same act that regenerates, or re-births us, or whatever term you prefer to use, brings us also at one and the same time into membership of Christ's body. Scripture teaches no other route in and, regardless of where and with whom a person fellowships subsequently, he or she will always be a member of that *One Body*. We are spiritually born into membership of God's Church just as a child is born into membership of a family.

Membership of the churches

In contrast to the sublime statements referring to the believer's new birth and simultaneous membership of Christ's spiritual body, Scripture contains no reference to anyone's becoming a member of a local church. It would appear that, in those early days of simplicity and non-denominationalism, a member of Christ's Church was automatically included in the fellowship of the local church. There was no inaugural ceremony, no creed to be read and no book to sign, a person would be received into fellowship solely on the basis of his or her new birth. This however,

does not mean that new converts were not soon made familiar with ‘the apostles doctrine’ (Acts 2:42) and ‘the principles (foundations) of the doctrine of Christ’ (Heb. 6:1&2).

Note: A person could be thereafter put out of fellowship (ex-communicated) on the basis of immoral conduct. When this is done the aim is never to permanently exclude but rather to bring to repentance in order that the person can be accepted back into the congregation: read 1 Cor. 5 in conjunction with 2 Cor. 2:1-11.

There is no warrant for believers to take on themselves any special name that relates to the particular church they fellowship with, nor for that matter, any specific name that gives emphasis to a particular doctrinal viewpoint. It is not my intention to offend anyone in saying truthfully and categorically that there were no Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Calvinists, Pre-millennialists, Post-millennialists etc. To make this point abundantly clear, there were no individuals or churches given any authority from God to use these names as a means of identifying themselves. In 1 Cor. 1:12 Paul writes: **“Now this I say, that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas (Peter); and I of Christ”**. Read this passage of Scripture in context and you will find that the people saying these things were rebuked for being divisive.

Individual assemblies were simply identified by their geographical location and in Acts. 11:26 we read that the disciples were **“called”** CHRISTIANS. This word ‘called’ [CHREMATIZO] conveys the idea of a Divinely revealed word. It is possible that unbelievers may have coined this word initially, however it is clearly validated by the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 16). This became the universally accepted title given to those who had received the life of CHRIST within. Other Scriptural terms used to identify such people include ‘Saints’, ‘Believers’, ‘Disciples’, and ‘Followers of the/that way’. Let us take deep into our hearts these words of wisdom - **“I am a Christian or a believer or I will call myself by any other name approved by the Holy Ghost, but I will not give to myself names that will divide me from my brethren”** (spoken by John Bunyan - quoted from memory). Whatever local church we fellowship with we should be content to simply align ourselves with Christ alone and confine ourselves to such names as are ‘approved’ of God.

What is the purpose of the Church?

It has already been mentioned that, above all things, the Church exists for God: **“Thou has created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created”** (Rev. 4:11). God loves all of His creation and it is not His heart’s desire that any should perish (Jn. 3:16 & 2 Pet. 3:9). However, because of sin many will perish, but in Jesus God has made a way of escape. God, is through all ages, calling-out a people to be co-heirs with His son. This has implications both for our present lives on earth and forever in eternity. He wants to share His kingdom because it is a kingdom of eternal love and fellowship.

Further more, the Church is the *Body* of Christ. That is, all the while the Church continues to exist on the earth it is acting as a vehicle for Jesus to be expressed in the world. He wants to reach out to a lost creation through His Body. He could of course do this quite independently if He chose to but there are other agendas too. God has to bring to a close the conflict with Satan and his fallen angelic followers and mankind, particularly the Church of Jesus Christ is bound up in this issue.

What is the purpose of the churches?

The local church is one tiny element of the entire Universal Church. It is not a complete Body of itself, but one small part of the whole. The work of the local assembly is largely limited to the location in which it gathers. A church has the task of nurturing and edifying its members within. Therefore we are told in the letter to the Hebrews that we must not **“forsake the assembling of**

ourselves together". By forsaking the assembling of ourselves together we: 1) miss out on the grace that the Lord wants to minister to us through the Body, and 2) we are not available to contribute our part to this process whereby we are intended to be the means by which God blesses others. Incidentally, this latter participation is also a means of spiritual growth in ourselves. We will be considering this in more depth under the section on *'How should a church meet?'* Here we will see more clearly what *'an assembling together'* means.

A note on 'worship': Many think that we meet in the church in order to worship God. This is not the main emphasis given in the New Testament for gathering together. The prime reason for coming together is for God to speak to us through one another so that the believers can be edified (built up) and matured. Partly this misconception is due to not understanding the essential meaning of the word 'worship'. Worship is not fundamentally to do with singing and praying. The first ever mention of this word in our Bible shows us its vital meaning, it occurs in Genes 22:5. Abraham was about to offer his beloved son to God as a sacrifice. His 'instruments' of worship were a sharp knife, wood and fire. This was not an occasion for a tuneful stroll up the hill. The meaning of the word 'worship' is self-denying sacrifice in response to God's demands on our lives. This is primarily worked-out in everyday living as individuals. The main purpose of the local gathering is to exhort one another to go and live such lives before God. This, of course, does not mean that a church should not sing to the Lord together, Ephesians 5:19 says: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord". It is important to notice in the above verse though that the singing isn't solely "to the Lord" but also to each other - "to yourselves." This means that the songs we sing need to contain not only praises to God but also sound biblical instruction in order to play their part in the maturing of the members. (See *'How should a church meet'* for more on this subject).

So the local fellowship has a commitment to its own members within, ***"to build one another up in our most holy faith"***, to nurture with milk the newly converted and to feed with meat the maturing members. The following scriptures are a few that can be cited from the New Testament which give clear direction to the individual Christian and to the local church regarding the means by which God's grace and blessing is ministered to us and through us:

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts. 2:42).

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

"but exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13).

Paul writes to Timothy telling him ***"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee..."*** (1 Tim. 4:13).

Let us not limit these practices only to the times when the church gathers together but these gifts from God should be used wherever and whenever Christians meet one another in our daily lives. We are told to ***"let our speech be always seasoned with grace"*** and that ***"men should pray everywhere."***

Every member of the local church has something to contribute within it and to the work with which it is involved. Such contributions may be practical, spiritual, financial, the giving of time, effort, or whatever, however seemingly small. The local church is a place where believers might give and receive and thereby grow in God.

Authority & Function

Authority in the Universal Church

This next part of our study is divided into three categories. Firstly, *'Authority in the Universal Church'*, secondly, *'Authority in the local churches'* and thirdly, a special section looking at the word 'pastor' - *'The pastoral system'*. This third section is necessary for two reasons: 1) we must ask to which of the first two categories does this role belong? And 2) extra space and attention is required to examine this function in the light of strongly preconceived ideas found in our age and culture.

It will help us tremendously to a more balanced view of the New Testament teaching on this subject if we think of the word 'authority' as always implying a gifting or ministry, also as being a 'function performed', or simply a 'recognized role' not an 'office held' (see glossary for note on 'office').

While Christians must always respect and acknowledge and indeed benefit from every true minister of Christ, we must not falsely ennoble such roles; e.g. today we equate the title 'minister' with something and someone quite respected, professional and qualified. In biblical times the word simply meant a servant, someone to be used or even abused! Honour where honour is due, but let no man think of himself as anything more than a mere bond slave of our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.

Mat.16:18 is the first occasion that the Lord himself directly mentions the Church, He says **"... I will build My Church and the gates of hell (that is, all the plans and conspiracies) shall not prevail against it."** In Colossians we are told: **"for by Him (Jesus Christ) were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him, and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things He might have the pre-eminence."** (Col. 1:16-18). Emphatically it is always, ever, His Church, and He is the absolute authority in it, over it and through it. Therefore, no man, whether he be called an apostle or an elder or whatever, has total authority in **His Church**. Having established incontrovertibly His authority over every believer, we will go on to look at the people He has given to His Church who bear a measure of that authority.

"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." (Eph. 4:11,12).

"And God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers..." (1 Cor. 12:28).

As previously mentioned the word 'pastor' will be examined more closely later. This leaves us with *apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers*.

The context of both of the above quotations is very clearly the 'One' (universal) Body of Christ. In the Ephesians quote the passage leading up to it refers to the **"one body"** (vs. 4). The same phrase is used in the Corinthian passage (vs.13). Of course, all of the local churches are a part of that One Body, but we must not think that in every local assembly there were apostles, prophets ... etc! These ministries exist in *The* Body of Christ as a whole, not every local assembly. One hallmark of these men is that they spend much of their time travelling in order to: 1) evangelise the

unconverted and establish new congregations, and 2) visit established assemblies in order to further edify them.

A little further on in this study we shall be looking at *'Authority in the local churches'*. Those with authority in each local church are called 'elders'. An obvious question that will be asked is: Can a person with a 'Universal Church gifting' also serve as an elder in a particular local church? Certainly at the beginning of the New Testament Church this was so. All of the original apostles were also elders in the church at Jerusalem. However, none of the later apostles are ever shown to be elders in any local assembly. With Paul it is very clear that he was permanently itinerant. There may also have been some extra special sense to the title 'elders' given to the original twelve? It does not appear that these two roles continued to be compatible - (see *'Appendix 2'* for more on the development of the Church). What about the other four ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4? We will consider the last two, pastors and teachers, to some extent in the section entitled *'The pastoral system'* where we will look at two possible interpretations in reference to these. As for prophets and evangelists also acting as elders in a local church there is little to go on to make any clear statement on this. It is not the purpose of this study to try to delineate every last detail of the 'outward' form of the Church but rather centre on the clearly defined roles that are found in Scripture.

[If this last paragraph seems confusing at present you may find it helpful to read the section on *'Authority in the local churches'* and then return to this part].

All authority in God's Church works by willing submission and mutual respect of one another's consciences. Every individual believer shall give account of himself or herself at the judgement seat of Christ. Therefore the Church of God does not have an unquestionable chain of command. This does not mean we are all our own masters. We are equally accountable if we reject another man's authority/counsel when he is genuinely acting under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The spiritual man must judge (weigh up) all things!

Before looking at the 'universal ministries' it is necessary to read a little more of the quote from Ephesians 4 in order to see why these ministries exist: ***"And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."*** Where the A.V. text reads ***"for"*** the work of the ministry the marginal rendering in some study Bibles is ***"unto."*** This is a very different emphasis as this means that *'the ministry'* is the work of all the saints (i.e. every Christian) not just a select few. The job of the select few i.e. the apostles, prophets etc. is to equip the saints (all Christians) for this work. We cannot here delve into the question of "what is the ministry?" In short, it is the God-given privilege for every believer to act as a spiritual priest in serving (ministering to) both God and fellow man. (See Glossary under *Ministry* for more).

The following is an overview of four of the five ministries mentioned in Ephesians 4 - apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers. As for the question of "do all these ministries still exist today?" for those that believe that the Scripture is inspired by God as a pattern for all churches, at all places, at all times the argument is resolved (see Appendix 1). Of course this still leaves the situation of there also being false apostles, false prophets etc! Here we will simply look at some key references to those who were the genuine ministers of God.

APOSTLES [GK. APOSTOLOS] - means delegate, ambassador, messenger, he that is sent, also translated once as 'messenger'.

We all, of course, are familiar with the original twelve apostles and how Judas, in effect, turned out to be a false apostle. In Acts 1:26 we read that Matthias was appointed as replacement for Judas

and it seems his appointment is acknowledged and confirmed in Acts 2:14 - there were *the eleven*, plus Peter. Some feel that as Matthias is afterwards never mentioned again in Scripture, in reality God's choice of replacement was Paul. He is clearly called an apostle in many instances starting with Acts 14:14. The same verse also confirms unambiguously that Barnabas was an apostle. In Gal. 1:19 we see that James the Lord's brother had become an apostle. A careful reading of 1 Thessalonians shows that Silas and Timothy were referred to as being apostles (1 Thes. 1:1 & 2:6) though some argue that the "we" refers only to Paul and Silas and may not include Timothy (see 1 Thes. 3:1,2). In Philippians 2:25 Epaphroditus is called an 'apostolos' – translated as 'messenger'.

So we have eighteen or nineteen references to persons named as apostles in the New Testament. By simply taking account of the meaning of the word 'apostle' and by examining what we can of the lives and deeds of all the above mentioned we might easily be led to conclude there were others that seemed to be authorised to act in the same capacity. There is Titus who was told to appoint elders in Titus 1:6, Apollos who is named alongside Paul and Peter (1 Cor. 1:12) and possibly Sosthenes (see 1 Cor. 1:1, then 1 Cor. 4:9). Then there is Luke who didn't just travel with Paul but more notably, wrote the single largest contribution to our New Testament. If we take Luke's writings page for page, they comprise more than either Paul or John individually wrote. If the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles, how can we not include the books of Luke as part of our foundation?

Paul was very clearly held in great regard by others who were themselves apostles. He sent and called for them and they were happy to submit to his wishes. However, this only worked by their willingness to do so, they could all operate according to their own consciences before God as is seen in the instance of 1 Cor. 16:12 - "***As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.***"

On concluding this very brief overview of apostles, it should be said that, it is clear that the early apostles (whether just the original twelve or all those aforementioned) had a very special commission from God. For example, in Mat.16:19 we read of Peter receiving the keys of the kingdom; a subsequent reading of the first twelve chapters of the book of Acts shows us that Peter was used of God as His 'key' man to unlock the door for many to enter the kingdom. In Gal. 2:7&8 we are told that Peter had a special calling to bring the Gospel to the Jews and Paul likewise to the Gentiles. In Rev. 21:14 we see that the names of the 'twelve apostles of the Lamb' are written in the foundation walls of the New Jerusalem. Also we must remember that the above-mentioned apostles were authors of Holy Scripture, which is now complete.

PROPHETS [GK. PROPHETES] - means foreteller, inspired speaker and poet. Also, 'forth-teller' - i.e. 'a teller-forth of the word of God'.

It is worth first noting that a prophet is not just someone who predicts the future. The word 'PROPHETES' implies being close to God and enabled by Him to 'speak by inspiration'. Prophecy is the spontaneous word from the Holy Spirit being expressed through human lips. To be occasionally moved of God in a prophetic gift is not the same as *being* a prophet. This principle is better explained below under the section on 'teachers' - we may all teach in a general sense but this is not the same as *being* a teacher. There are only a few references to prophets in the New Testament. Those named specifically are Agabus, Judas (not Iscariot) and Silas. These are all mentioned in the book of Acts. I leave you to conduct your own research: Acts 11:27, 13:1, 15:32 and 21:10.

EVANGELISTS [GK. EUANGELISTES] - means a preacher of the Gospel.

Now we are down to just one named example of an evangelist, it is Philip of course - Acts 21:8. We have a wonderful account of Philip in action in Acts 8:26-40. Essentially, the evangelist's ministry is to those who are not yet Christ's. In verse 35, we see that Philip '*started from the place*' where the Ethiopian was reading. This is the gift of evangelism, to meet with the unconverted and take them from wherever they are, be it atheism or religion, and lead them to Jesus the Saviour. Also note that Timothy was told to *do the work of an evangelist*, though it did not say he *was* an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

TEACHERS [GK. DIDASKALOS] - means instructor, also translated once as 'masters' (James 3:1) and once as 'doctors' (Luke 2:46).

In Acts 13:1 we read "***there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers;***" we are then given a list of five people that were such. We cannot easily separate out who were the prophets and who were the teachers in this instance, that is except for Saul (Paul), who is clearly noted as a teacher (1 Tim. 2:7, 2 Tim 1:11). We must bear in mind that he was also an apostle and therefore we cannot definitively use him as a pure pattern of a teacher. This is, however, a good example of how ministries are often combined.

Teaching is a ministry that carries with it a great weight of responsibility and accountability "***My brethren, be not many masters*** (do not all try to become teachers), ***knowing that we shall receive greater condemnation*** (or judgement)" (James 3:1). Notice here that James uses "***we***", therefore we can conclude that he also was a teacher. The writer to the Hebrews says, "***for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles*** (the basics) ***of the oracles*** (the word) ***of God***" (Heb. 5:12). It would be a contradiction of James if this were a literal encouragement to all to aspire to the specific office of teacher. It is more likely that it refers to the every-day teaching ability that every Christian needs in order to exhort one another; in fact, this was a statement of exasperation!

From this word [DIDASKALOS] is derived the English, 'didactic', which means - 'to teach authoritatively'. This word appears in its verb form DIDASKŌ in 1 Tim. 2:12 - "***... I suffer not*** (do not permit) ***a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man ...***" Compare this with Paul's statement that the older women should "***... teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands ...***" (Titus 2:4). Here a different Greek word is used - [SOPHRONIZO], which implies practical instruction, more by example as opposed to 'expositional teaching'.

We must also make the distinction between *teaching* in a general sense and the specific calling of *being* a teacher. We read in Col. 3:16 "***let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another; in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.***" Here, '*teaching one another*' does not imply that we are all teachers, any more than it implies we all have wonderful singing voices!

So we see that there are at least three different ways that people can teach:

1. Authoritative, 'expositional' teaching.
2. Teaching/showing by example.
3. Every-day admonishing/encouraging one another.

The latter two are the privilege and responsibility of all Christians. The first is exclusively the work of those to whom God has given the gift of teaching.

Missionaries?

Now I would like to offer some food for thought by mentioning the term ‘missionary’. This has become a commonly accepted title, particularly in the last few centuries, but it is not a biblical word (even if the idea may be). Whenever we use non-biblical words we only succeed in fogging an issue. If a person has a clear calling from God in an apostolic role then it is simpler to use ‘approved’ Bible terminology – he is an *apostle*. If a man has been given the calling to evangelise – he is an *evangelist*. If the biblical definitions fit the role, then we should not be afraid to use such. I am not trying to be picky in mentioning this; this is a very important principle that applies to all Christian terminology. For example, if we wanted to examine the role of a ‘missionary’ and find biblical examples and indeed encouragements, we would not be able to do so. If someone, on the other hand, wishes to know how an apostle should behave, or believes that God has called him to be an evangelist, then, we can turn to the Word of God and receive clear instruction. This does not mean that everyone we call a missionary necessarily falls into the category of apostle or evangelist etc. There are many other valuable supportive roles. Various people accompanied and assisted Paul in his apostolic work. These other supportive roles in the Church are mentioned in the second half of 1 Cor. 12:28, in particular, “*helps*” is often overlooked.

Some further thoughts on the Universal Church ministries

Two notable hallmarks of the ministries in the ‘Church Universal’ are: 1) the geographic extent of their work goes beyond the confines of one local assembly, and 2) the effect of their ministry/teaching often continues even after they have departed this earth. In other words, it spans time as well as location.

Finances

Another point which needs to be mentioned here is that those whose ministries inevitably mean that they must travel regularly, and cannot be entirely rooted and settled in one given locality, are worthy of the necessary financial support. This is for obvious reasons; as such a person cannot be employed in the normal fashion (see 1 Cor. 9:4-18 and Phil. 4:14-18). It is the duty of individual Christians and the local church elders to sensitively seek God’s guidance as to contributing to the needs of His servants. However, we also read that the apostle Paul renounced this support if ever it was liable to hinder the gospel: Acts 18:3, 21:34, 1 Thes 2:5-9.

Note: We should bear in mind that some teachers and evangelists might not need to travel so much in the modern world in order to fulfil their ministry. For example an evangelist may live in a city so populous that it may rarely be necessary for him to travel very far in order to continually preach the Gospel to new ears. In an age where writing is such an accessible medium some who have the gift of teaching may use this God-approved method to disseminate their messages far and wide and may substitute a lot of travelling with time spent writing. Provided that we remain within the clearly shown principles of Scripture there is surely some degree of flexibility in the way a gift is expressed in different people. It is up to the Lord’s people to be sensitive and perceptive in recognising those who are genuinely *about their Father’s business* and in need their support.

A final word on the subject of money: In mat. 6:24 Jesus made a sharp distinction between two groups of people – those who serve God and those who serve mammon (the love of money). Attitude to money is one quite simple way of telling apart the false from the genuine in the realm of apostles, prophets, teachers and others. This whole topic needs to be explored as a separate study but I would just like to mention two points on the spiritual man’s attitude to receiving financial/practical support. These are lessons so well expressed in the life of faith and faithfulness lived by a man named George Muller. Firstly, we should not advertise our needs to any man, but rather make our requests known only unto God. Secondly, a man of faith should know that “*God’s work, done in God’s way, never lacks God’s support.*” - (George Muller).

Jesus fulfils every office

I would like to end this whole section with one final consideration for us to meditate upon. All of the above ‘offices’ of Eph. 4:11 belong first and foremost to the Lord Jesus, along with His many other titles. Below is just one reference for each:

- ❖ **APOSTLE** Heb.3:1
- ❖ **PROPHET** Mark 6:4
- ❖ **EVANGELIST** Luke 7:22..... He ‘preached’ [EUNGGELIZO] - *evangelised*.
- ❖ **PASTOR** Heb.13:20..... Translated as *shepherd*.
- ❖ **TEACHER** John 3:2

Authority in the local churches

So far we have looked at four of the five specific ‘offices’ (distinct, recognized roles) mentioned in Ephesians 4. We will come to ‘pastors’ in the next section. We have seen that these men have been given to the ‘One’ Church - v.4: **“one body.”** Meanwhile, what about the individual local assemblies, is there any evidence of men being appointed to any special task on the local level?

There was indeed a form of government that the apostles established in each local assembly of believers. In Acts 14:23 we read that the apostles Paul and Barnabas, on their return visits to the churches in Asia Minor, **“ordained** (appointed) **elders** (plural) **in every church** (singular).” We know also that there were elders at the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 11:30), Acts 15 mentions those elders five times. In Acts 20 Paul wished to speak to the representatives of the church at Ephesus, so he called for the elders. In Titus 1:5 we read that Titus was charged with the task of appointing elders in all the cities of Crete. There are abundant references that show without doubt that this form of government for each local church is the clearly established principle for the New Testament age: Jam. 5:14, 1 Pet. 5:1 and so on.

ELDERS [GK. PRESBUTEROS] - meaning seniors or a council. There is a synonymous term: **BISHOPS** [GK. EPISKOPOS] - superintendent, officer in charge, also trans. as: **OVERSEERS**. All three of the above terms relate to the exact same office. This study mainly uses ‘elders’.

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:5-9)

(It is quite clear from the Titus account that these descriptions, i.e. *elders* and *bishops*, are used interchangeably).

“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into

reproach and the snare of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

Let us not think here that Paul is setting out some special code of conduct for such people that need not apply to everyone else. He is simply outlining that which is stated elsewhere in scripture as the minimal expected morality and discipline for all believers. The only exception here is that elders must be ***“apt to teach”*** (give *didactic* instruction). This does not necessarily imply that all elders are, in the sense of the previous section, *teachers*, it may only mean that they must have *some measure of ability* to teach on a local level. This small point is debatable and will be dealt with under the two possible interpretations in the ‘*pastor*’ section.

The following two passages give considerable insight into the role of elders:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed (lit. shepherd) the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:28,29)

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed (lit. shepherd) the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” (1 Pet 5:1-4)

Elders are spiritual shepherds in the local church. It is known that shepherds of that day used to round up the sheep into a pen and then sit in the doorway to guard them. (This is the imagery that Jesus is alluding to in John chapter 10; in particular in verse 7 when He says, ***“I am the door of the sheep.”***). On the one hand they must not let the wolves come in, but at the same time they must not stand in the way of the ‘Chief Shepherd’ or His genuine representatives when they come. This was what happened when Jesus ***“came unto His own (things)”*** in Israel. The parable of the vineyard (Mat. 21:33-45) shows us that the ‘shepherds’ of Israel had taken control and rebelled against the rightful heir when he came! In this instance the metaphor is that of ‘Husbandmen’ (overseers of the vineyard) but the spiritual analogy is the same. They also rejected the genuine prophets that were sent from God to them.

The elders in a fellowship have the awesome responsibility of ‘judging’ between that which is from God and that, which is not. A wrong judgement either way is something for which they will have to give account for to God! They are not the owners of the flock; they are ‘under-shepherds’ who watch over the flock on behalf of another. They are directly responsible to the ‘Chief Shepherd’ himself. It is His flock not theirs.

Analogy Warning! Although it is quite correct to use the analogy of shepherds in reference to the role of elders, we need to take great care that we do not unthinkingly pursue this, or any other biblical analogy, too far. The Bible is full of types and figures, some apparent, others not. But we must understand that such are given purely as illustrations of a particular spiritual truth or principle, we must not get so carried away with the picture as to then construct all kinds of doctrines from it. It is a wonderful thing to meditate on a biblical allegory and discover more of the background concerning these beautiful themes. However, as an example of the limitation of analogies let me ask, have you ever seen a shepherd who was also a sheep!? Although the role of an elder is likened to a shepherd we must always remember that at the same time those who are elders are still sheep themselves along with everyone else. Overemphasis of the shepherd-sheep analogy could easily lead to all kinds of ideas and practises that go beyond the intended illustration.

Appointment of elders

With regard to *how* elders are selected, there are four main schools of thought:

1. Appointment by a higher authority.
2. Election by the local congregation.
3. A combination of 1&2.
4. Once established, the existing elders choose the new elders.

1. Appointment by a higher authority

This could appear to be the precedent set by Paul in instructing Titus: ***“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed (commanded) thee.”*** (Tit.1: 5). This conclusion may also seem justified when we read again the account in the book of Acts: ***“And when they (the apostles Paul and Barnabas) had ordained them elders in every church...”*** (Acts 14:23). However, there are many other factors that come to light on further exploration of these texts, which lead us to number two.

2. Election by the local congregation

Essentially, the word ‘ordain’ means ‘to appoint’. The particular Greek word used in Acts 14:23 can convey, in its etymology (root origins of the word), the idea of ‘*appoint by stretching forth the hand*’. This could, in fact, be taken in two different ways. Either the raising of hands, as in a vote, or it could be interpreted as the ‘laying-on of hands’. Arguments could be put forth for both of these concepts.

On the side of the first (congregational choice), we have already seen the instance of the ‘brethren’ being given the mandate to choose *the seven* at Jerusalem (Acts 6:3). In defence of believing it to mean the second (laying-on of hands), one could argue that the choice aspect was only in relation to the selecting of deacons, not elders. One could further say that the laying-on of hands was clearly associated with ‘appointment’ in Acts 13:3 - ***“And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”*** If this latter view is correct, then when we read in 1 Tim. 5: 22 ***“Lay hands suddenly on no man ...”*** we could understand this to mean – “do not appoint a man to be an elder without much deliberation.” We shall not delve any further into the development of these two arguments except to say that; while the origins of words can sometimes give us deeper insight into their meaning, it is just as often difficult to interpret.

3. A combination of 1&2

This was more accurately the case at Jerusalem when they appointed *the seven*: ***“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”*** (Acts 6:3). But it is not made apparent that this dual method continues to be the same when we read of instances referring to the appointment of elders.

4. Once established, the existing elders choose the new elders

Although we do not have any direct precedence for our fourth consideration, a strong case can be made on the basis that it is the Holy Spirit who has authorized the existing elders. ***“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers”*** (Acts 20:28). Here Paul is addressing the elders from Ephesus (vs. 17). In this instance we understand that ultimately it is God who has validated the choice of the initially appointed

elders. Seeing that it is the elders who are accountable to the Lord for all oversight of that assembly it would not be unreasonable to propose that the decision is theirs.

Conclusion of above

It is very difficult to arrive at a clear for-all-time pattern for the *method* of appointing elders in local churches. I am not saying it does not exist, but it seems that the Holy Spirit, when ‘inspiring’ the biblical record, chose to lay the emphasis elsewhere with regards to the subject of eldership. The point, which takes precedence over any ‘technical’ arguments of *how* elders are appointed, is *who* should be made an elder? The passages in 1 Timothy and Titus show us that the main emphasis is upon the *character* of those appointed not the *method* of appointment.

Further considerations

We must also bear in mind that the term ‘elder’ can be a comparative one. For example, in a gathering of people mainly aged 30-40, the few people present who are 50 years of age may be considered, in the comparative sense, the elders. But if age alone were the determining factor in the appointing of elders in a church, then all that would be required is an examination of birth certificates and that would be the end of the matter. A second way that a man may be ‘comparatively’ an elder is the length of time since his conversion. In other words, it is not his physical age that is relevant but the number of years of his spiritual lifetime. Once again, if this were all that is implied in being an elder, a short rehearsal of conversion testimonies would be sufficient to settle the matter. We are coming closer to the truth with this second point; however, the spiritual realm does not directly correlate with the physical. The spiritual age (i.e. maturity) of someone cannot be guaranteed to always reflect the length of time since his ‘new-birth’. Therefore, we conclude that ‘elder’ in its comparative sense means ‘of greater *spiritual* maturity’. This does not mean that the first two factors are of no consequence at all. In an ideal situation spiritual maturity should be a result of the first two.

Now we come to the most important point with respect to the appointing of elders from among a congregation. Whatever the *method* employed, the appointment is not so much a ‘*choosing*’ of the elders, but rather should be a *recognition* of those who truly *are* the elders (most spiritually mature) already. No amount of doctrinal analysis will guarantee that this will happen. The ultimate governing factor in whether the right men are appointed or not, will be the ‘spiritual temperature’ of the assembly. This should be our chief concern.

Elders, in Scripture, are always appointed from *within* a church, never *sent to* a church. If an assembly cannot at some stage in its development produce men of ‘elder’ quality there must be something fundamentally amiss!

Are elders paid for what they do?

First and foremost it must be stated that there are no ‘professionals’ in God’s Church, only bondservants. We have already touched upon material support for those with a Universal Church ministry. This should be given on the basis of need and the recognition that such a person is genuinely doing the work of God. Essentially the same principles can be applied at the local level. There is precedence for this, which we shall look at shortly. Before we do take a look at the relevant Scripture though, some meditation upon this question will lead us to see an important principle in interpreting and applying the New Testament in different ages and cultures:

We must realise that this is primarily a *practical* concern not a *spiritual* one and whilst all *spiritual* principles translate from the New Testament into every society and every age, this is not always

true of every *practical* issue. For example, the first half of 1 Timothy 5 tells us of the ‘*widows roll*’ - a list of widows, in particular those bereft of family support, who were to be provided for by the church: **“Honour widows that are widows indeed”** (vs. 3). In those days there were no insurances, pensions or welfare state and it was fitting that a church should make provision for the needs of those who had little or no means of income. Of course, where necessary, this still applies to the churches of today. However, for many situations today the practical need isn’t the same. It would be quite inappropriate for a church to regularly pass on money to a widow if she already had ample provision provided for her by various other means. The following reference, which in part refers to the giving of material support to elders, flows directly on from this passage and the same common sense principles must apply.

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith Thou shall not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the labourer is worthy of his reward.” (1 Tim. 5:17,18).

We will now look in a little more detail at the practical applications that need to be considered in relation to this verse. First of all, there is certainly no inference in Scripture that when a man is appointed as an elder he must cease secular employment. Unlike the ministry of an apostle, there is nothing inherent in an elder’s role that would not allow for him to be employed in a normal fashion. So why is this provision for elders mentioned? We must think in terms of the *practical* situations that existed at that time. In so doing we see that there are two important factors in many of today’s societies that place many of us in a different position in respect of practical needs:

1. Money - As a generalisation, most of us (particularly in the Western world) are financially and all round materially better off than they were.
2. Time - In at least two ways: First, travelling was a much slower process in those days. Elders as a part of their responsibility must travel to some extent in order to visit the sick and the widows and orphans (this is not a conclusive list of situations that elders need to go out to). Second, study in preparation for teaching. They didn’t have the ‘instant’ tools that we have today. Also, some of them would have had to hand write copies of Scripture for themselves and each other.

Even though there was a plurality of elders in every church some of these responsibilities were very time consuming which meant less time available to spend on their very labour intensive jobs of those days. Wages were not as good as many of us have today. In fact, much of people’s labour went into producing their own food. Of course there are still parts of the world today where people have a similar existence. In these circumstances and in cases where an elder does need to spend an exceptional amount of time to fulfil his duty, then the supply obligation continues to fall upon the local assembly.

The supply of these needs for those who served the Lord was on a spontaneous (free-will) basis rather than a ‘fixed wage’. Do not misinterpret the following passage: **“Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.”** (2 Cor. 11:7-9). The use of the word ‘*wage*’ here does not literally mean ‘regular salary’ any more than ‘*robbed*’ can be taken literally!

Note: In all of this we must be careful not to miss the much more immediate meaning of this verse. While the reference to elders can be taken to apply to material need it is important to note that the primary meaning of the word ‘honour’ here is ‘value’, ‘esteem’, ‘respect’. This can be clearly seen by a reading of all other places in the New Testament where this word [TIMÉ] is used. Therefore, **“double honour,”** conveys both of these meanings – firstly, spiritual respect and secondly, (if necessary) material support.

In summary of money matters

- ❖ An elder is not a salaried professional.
- ❖ There is no inference in Scripture that elders must leave off secular work.
- ❖ If an elder, in carrying out his duties (nurturing, teaching, visiting) does need some material support then it is perfectly apt that he should receive such.
- ❖ The practical needs (never spiritual) in many societies of today may differ from those of the first century.

In conclusion of elders

- ❖ At some point in a church's development a plurality of elders are appointed from within that congregation.
- ❖ The qualifications for an elder are primarily moral character/spiritual maturity.
- ❖ All elders must be 'apt to teach'; even as they must all 'feed' (literally in the Greek 'pastor/shepherd') the flock.
- ❖ No *formal* training is required to produce any of the necessary qualities of an elder.

It is not within the scope of this study to examine all of the work and responsibilities of elders in relation to every Bible reference. In addition to the simple summary above it should also be borne in mind that among the elders there will be a variation of their time available to commit to the congregation. Inevitably there will be difference of ability and diversity of personality among them. All this, in the right godly environment, where there is unity in love and soundness of doctrine, makes for a strong and wonderfully rich assembly.

DEACONS [GK. DIAKONOS] - meaning, and also translated as: minister and servant.

“Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 3:8-13)

What is the role of a deacon? We can see from the above quotation how important character was, but there is no 'outline of duties' given as such. The word DIAKONOS implies “*acting as a servant.*” Given that *spiritual* responsibility in the local churches is clearly placed with the elders, this leaves the area of *practical* needs.

Are the seven men mentioned in the book of Acts, chapter 6, deacons? Though the term 'deacon' is not directly used in reference to them, the related words in the Greek; DIAKONIA (translated as 'ministrations' in vs. 1) and DIAKONEO (translated as 'serve' in vs. 2) are applied to the function that these men were appointed to. The church in Jerusalem was unique in many ways (see *appendix 2*) but I think it is reasonable to conclude that *the seven* are our earliest, and in fact only, example of deacons. It is clear that the sphere of their responsibilities was: 1) local and 2) practical.

What about Stephen's gifts of preaching and miracles (Acts 6:8)? As will be shown in our section under '*How should a church meet?*' spiritual gifts are not exclusive to any church 'office'. Stephen was not gifted in these ways because he was a deacon. All who are enabled of God and filled with His Spirit can function in God's gifts. We must bear in mind that being 'apt to teach'

is not a necessary quality for a deacon. It does seem that 'faith' and 'faithfulness' are qualities that accompany this honoured role.

Women as deacons

Is there some argument from Scripture that shows that women can be deacons? Five times the Greek word DIAKONOS has been translated as 'deacon': 1 Tim. 3:10 & 13, 1 Tit. 3:8 & 12 and Phil. 1:1. It is clear that in the translators' minds these instances refer to a church 'office' as opposed to someone being in a non-specific sense a servant or minister. On other occasions DIAKONOS is translated as 'servant' or 'minister': Mat. 23:11, Mk. 9:35, Jn. 12:26, Rom. 13:14 and Rom. 16:1. The last instance on this list (Rom. 16:1) is sometimes cited as an occasion where DIAKONOS could be translated as 'deacon' and therefore shows that this office is open to women: ***"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant (DIAKONOS) of the church which is at Cenchræ:"***

When Bible translators use more than one English word to translate the same one word from Greek or Hebrew, they are acting not solely as translators but also to some extent interpreters. Their interpretation has to be based upon, among other things, context and the consistency of Scripture with Scripture. On this occasion the translating committee of the Authorized Version of the Bible correctly make Scripture agree with Scripture because in 1 Timothy 3:12 we read: ***"Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well."*** Not only is it absurd to say that a woman can be ***"the husband of one wife"*** but ***"ruling"*** (headship in the home) is clearly shown to be a male responsibility. We shall be considering briefly the topic of women's roles in the Church/churches in the section entitled *'Women and authority'*.

In summary, the appointment of deacons is not given in Scripture the same attention and importance as the appointment of elders in the local church. The *seven* were appointed at Jerusalem as the result of a practical need that arose. Therefore, *if, when, and how many* will depend upon the practical needs in hand.

The pastoral system

The above title is my own terminology for a system of government that exists in the majority of churches worldwide and across most denominations. I do not know if others have used this phrase in any context but I hope that by the end of this section you will understand its intended meaning here. I have heard the term *'one-pastor-system'*, which equally well describes the unbiblical practice that we are about to examine. On this particular subject there is a strong need to appraise the common tradition of the vast majority of churches and where they differ from the scriptural pattern. This structure is, by and large, not even examined but rather, taken for granted - "It's just the way church is done!"

What is 'the pastoral system'?

In most churches there is one focal person who is in authority and has overall responsibility for 'ministry' in that church. Titles given to this person are: Vicar, Rector, Reverend, Priest, Father, Pastor, Senior Pastor, Minister, Bishop, Elder, Senior Elder, Pastor Elder, Leading Elder, Teaching Elder and many other variants. This 'office' exists in churches whether they are Episcopalian, Presbyterian or Congregationalist, whether they are Reformed or Charismatic, Calvinist or Arminian. The 'title' may vary, and the processes and qualifications for appointment may differ but the one common factor is, that there is an individual who is *the* focal figure for that assembly. So much so that the title is always preceded by the definite article, i.e. *The* Pastor, *The* Vicar, *The* Minister, *The* Senior Elder.

We have already well established in this study the clear biblical precedent for mutual, plural eldership in each local church. The apostles, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, organised churches this way for many reasons. So where does this system come from then?

- ❖ The Old Testament priesthood. “***And they said unto Moses, speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.***” (Exodus 20:19). Under the Old Covenant, even after the instituting of an atoning sacrifice, there was never the experience of a cleansed conscience (Heb. 9:9). Any approach to God, or vice versa, for the ‘ordinary’ person usually had to be carried out through a mediator i.e. a prophet or a priest. For the majority of the people that was exactly the way they wanted it. It was a permanent and inescapable feature of the *Old Covenant*.
- ❖ Other World Religions. When the world of religion, both current and past, is surveyed, we notice that every major religious organisation has a clear structure of ‘laity’ and ‘priests’. Not only is this basic distinction made but also within the ‘priesthood’ there is further hierarchy. After an initial period of terrible persecution the Church slowly found favour with the ‘powers that were’. Part of the price of their acceptance with Rome was the absolute necessity for a clearly defined hierarchical structure.
- ❖ The ‘Church Fathers’. By the time the first century came to a close all of the original apostles and witnesses of Jesus had passed away. Other church leaders were coming into prominence and there are numerous and various writings from these men ranging from the 2nd to the 4th/5th centuries. It is not in the scope of this study to discuss these men and their writings excepts to summarise thus: There were among them many good and godly men, some of whom were martyred for the Gospel’s sake. They wrote letters back and forth to individuals and churches – letters which contain very interesting insights into (some sections of) the church at that time. However, there is also in some of their writings clear evidence that in varying ways and to varying degrees some of these highly influential men promoted, or acknowledged, sacerdotal theology. In fact, it is more than likely that these tendencies were even in existence prior to the close of the first century.

We will consider this third point a little further. When we turn to the letters to the churches in the book of The Revelation, we see that two of the churches were upbraided for having in their midst those that held the doctrine of the ‘Nicolaitanes’ (Rev. 2:6,15). One possible meaning of the origin of this word is: NIKOS - victorious, and LAOS - the people – ‘victorious over the people’. In other words, the teaching that in God’s Church, there were those with the ability to uncover the mysteries of God, and the remainder, who needed the intercessory ministry of the former. In any case, we know from Church history that sacerdotalism (the belief in a ‘priest-class’ and the ordinary people) rapidly spread throughout the Church. When this grew to its fullest, hideous form it became the apostate church.

At the time of the Reformation there were those who protested about the many unscriptural beliefs and practices in the Catholic system. Many wrongs were righted and God wrought favourably for those who were His people. However, the Reformation was by no means a completed process that brought everything back to the New Testament pattern. In the area of Church government and the way that church meetings were conducted there was not a return to New Testament principles. Luther, Calvin, the Church of England bishops, and many other newly formed church systems continued to model their ‘form’ of churches similarly to those of Rome. Though many of the ‘non-conformist’ denominations of today do not adopt all of the Episcopalian structure, with respect to the ‘*one-priest/pastor/minister-per-church*’ practice, it is their common way.

Note: In using the above expression (one-pastor-per-church) I am not ignoring the fact that there is usually some body of people under this person’s authority. In some instances this person, while remaining the focal figure of the congregation, is himself under the authority of a governing body. Some examples of these ‘co-workers’ under/over/with the ‘pastor’ are: The Elders, The Co-

Pastor(s), The Junior Pastor(s), The Board of Elders/Deacons, The Pastoral Team, The Ministry Team, The church committee etc. Regardless of whether or not this body has a scriptural sounding name, it is none-the-less all part of the unbiblical 'pastoral system'.

What am I saying then? Is every church that has adopted the pastoral system an apostate church? No, because the state of apostasy is more a condition of the heart than solely an erring in doctrine or practice. It is also necessary to recognise that not all 'one-man' leader figures are in it for their own self-advancement. Furthermore, I am very grateful for the Reformation and the vast change for good it brought. But if we profess belief in the completeness of Scripture, then we must accept that what the New Testament reveals concerning the practice of the early churches is there as a pattern for the whole Church age.

What then of this word 'pastor'? Interestingly, though so much has been built around it, the word 'pastor' occurs only once in the New Testament. All that is plainly stated of such a role is simply "... *there are some ...*" So how can we gain any further understanding of what this may be? There are no examples of any individual who was called a 'pastor'. We cannot rely on historical definitions because we do not know whether they are accurate or an example of how this role has been misused; so, once again, using only 'God breathed' Scripture what conclusions can be drawn?

It will be helpful to us if we see again, the one New Testament verse that uses this word: "***And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.***" (Eph. 4:11). In seeking to analyse the meaning and role of a pastor, solely from the evidences in the New Testament, one is left with two areas of inconclusiveness:

1. Reading the text where this word occurs, some scholars would say that the role of 'pastor' and 'teacher' are but one because the article 'some' is left out in front of 'teachers'. Others say, that though the 'some' is omitted, the 'and' is still sufficient to indicate that these are two distinct persons. I am unable to come to any clear conclusion on this point based solely on grammatical analysis of this sentence. All further comments therefore will be with open-mindedness as to which of these views is correct.

2. Regardless of the inconclusiveness of the above, there are two relatively strong arguments from scripture as to what a pastor really is. We will therefore be giving consideration to both of these. It must be said however, that though there is some scope for argument in seeking to determine what is the exact nature of a pastor's role, it is abundantly clear from study of the New Testament what a pastor is not. There are two modes of examination open to us that lead to two possible interpretations: 1) the context and the list in which this word appears; and 2) associated words and ideas with the Greek word translated as pastor.

PASTOR [GK. POIMEN] - meaning shepherd, either figuratively or literally. POIMEN is also translated as 'shepherd' 17 times, on these occasions it is either referring to literal shepherds or figuratively used in reference to the Lord Jesus. This only leaves us with the one reference where it is translated as 'pastor' and listed as a ministry in the Church.

Interpretation 1 - *looking at the context*

This is quite simple and seemingly consistent with what we have looked at earlier regarding the other ministries of Ephesians 4. In this passage the sphere of ministry is not any local church, but the 'One' Universal Church. It would seem quite reasonable that number four on the list is an 'universal' ministry just like the rest. It has already been seen that 'teachers' operated in this wider sphere, if pastor and teacher are but one then all we read of teachers is really showing us pastors as well. Even if they are not one it would still seem consistent that 'pastors' also travelled visiting various churches to further feed and encourage the churches.

By this interpretation we might conclude that Paul's return visits to previously established congregations were more in a pastoral capacity rather than apostolic. He was a teacher in addition to being an apostle therefore he could have been a pastor as well. Titus and Timothy could be viewed in the same way, it is clear that they were not permanently stationed at any one particular church. Their ministries could be seen as apostolic and/or pastoral in this way.

On further reflection on this idea: there are many names mentioned of men who were of note among the Church, but it is not mentioned if they were noted for any particular 'ministry', could it be that some of these were pastors? There are many mature men of God in every age who labour much to encourage and stimulate (feed/pastor) the faith of many. They may not be recognised as 'pastors' because they have not been given that title and because of the preconceived belief that this function is the role of leading a particular local assembly.

Interpretation 2 - looking at the Greek word

Although the Ephesians 4 list is focussing upon the Universal Church it could be argued that the Universal Church also encompasses all local churches. Seeing that we do not have any other references to pastors in the New Testament it can't be proven that they were itinerates operating in the wider Church sphere like others in that list. Therefore, this leaves open the possibility of another interpretation.

In examining the original Greek word for pastor we can see that there are related words used in other forms in the Bible. The verb form POIMAINO is used several times translated as 'feed' and 'rule'. The following are two of the occasions where POIMAINO is translated as feed: Firstly, Acts 20:28, already quoted twice: *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over (or 'in') the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed (pastor) the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood."* And secondly, 1 Pet. 5:1-4: *"The elders who are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed (pastor) the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight of it, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd (ARCHIPOIMEN) shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."*

In these two passages we see that it is the elders/overseers that are told to 'pastor' the church/flock. The portrayal of elders as 'shepherds' is common to both the Old and New Testament. From this and other information we have looked at regarding elders it could be easily thought that the term 'pastor' is yet another synonymous term with that of elder, overseer and bishop. If this interpretation is correct then it is still absolutely clear that there is no distinct person among a group of elders who is *the* pastor - all elders are pastors with equal responsibility for the oversight of the assembly.

A note in conclusion: In looking at the subject of 'Authority in the Church/churches' there are many unequivocal facts to be seen for any who care to look. It would have no doubt become clear to the reader too that there are a few finer points that appear to be somewhat ambiguous, at least to me. It would be much easier (in terms of effort) and far more supportive (seemingly) to the main argument to simply take one line and hammer it through. However, it would give me no pleasure or peace to only make my point at the expense of pursuing 100% accuracy. This study is a pure quest for truth. This makes me as the author vulnerable, but beware, it makes you as the reader accountable! Whether we accept interpretation 1 or 2, I cannot find in Scripture any further alternatives, what is most clear is; what a pastor is not. In the all-final, authoritative written Word of God there is no mention of any such role in the local church as The Pastor!

Women and authority

This topic is better discussed under a much broader biblical study of Male and Female. However, it may seem unreasonable to some to simply state that women are not permitted to function in any of the aforementioned roles and leave it at that. That this is the case is quite clear

in Scripture, there are many references that make this patent. Here is one verse of Scripture that would automatically exclude women from all authoritative office in the Church/churches: ***“But I suffer not (do not permit) a women to teach (DIDASKO), nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (lit. distil from bustle). For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.”*** (1 Tim. 2:12-14). Some may think that this is only with respect to women teaching men but if this were the case why does Paul go on to talk about the woman being deceived? If Eve’s susceptibility to the Devil’s deception is part of the reason, how then could we say that it doesn’t matter if they are only teaching (DIDASKO) other women?

This quote from the Epistle to Timothy may lead one to think that the exclusion of women from serving the Church in these ways is solely a matter of susceptibility to deception. If it were only a matter of natural strengths and weaknesses, there would always be enough exceptions to the rule to give ground for argument against such restriction. No, the whole topic of Male and Female and our God-given roles is much more glorious. When we begin to see these things in our spirits, every true child of God should glory in what He has made him or her.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion ... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” (Gen. 1:26,27). The whole essence of male and female is that God has created us as a pictorial reflection of the Holy Trinity. God is three in one, and Man + Woman (which equals child/children) is a purpose-made ‘tri-union’ for the glory and pleasure of God.

We cannot here begin a study of the Trinity, but most relevant to our topic are two manifest facts: 1) there is absolute equality of being between Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and 2) at the same time there is clear order and authority among them. Here are just two examples where these two principles can be seen between the Father and the Son: ***“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (a thing to be grasped at) to be equal with God.”*** (Phil. 2:5,6) and the centurion addressing the Lord Jesus recognises that He was a man under authority: ***“For I also am a man set under authority ...”*** (Lk. 7:8). There is no ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ quality to male and female. We are of equal value and worth, interdependent and yet at the same time we were made to reflect the order of the Godhead.

This paradoxical principle is something rarely reflected in our fallen, distorted world, but in God’s Church, as we live by His Spirit, this should be restored. The Devil hates this image of God in mankind and his first tactic in seeking to corrupt God’s creation, was to reverse this order by approaching the woman first (Gen. 3:1). Any subsequent role reversal or even merging works to destroy this testimony of God’s image. Throughout the Bible, the allegories of God found in male and female vary; e.g. in Eph. 5:22-33 we see that the man represents Christ and the woman His bride i.e. the Church. In 1 Cor. 11:1-16 the relationship between man and woman is likened to the correlation between God the Father and Christ. In this instance the man is representing the Father and the woman, Christ. This latter portion of Scripture is a beautiful picture of the equality of men and women while displaying absolute obedience to God’s order. Although the pictorial roles we play vary, it is always consistent that the man represents the higher authority and the woman the submissive. This is the way God chose to make us.

It is our wonderful privilege as believers to live out before men and angels (1 Cor. 11:10) the roles for which we have been begotten of God. To put this in its perspective let us note the fact that the majority of males will not be called on by God to serve in a specific office during their lifetime. Remember James 3:1! Every child of God has already received the highest calling that any created being can have - to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. The whole Bible

testifies that God has created us according to His pleasure. It is not for the vessel to say unto the potter “why hast thou made me thus?”

Children and the church

Interestingly, there are no instructions in the New Testament regarding children in reference to either the Church Universal or the local assembly. Therefore, it must be concluded that they are, essentially, in no different position from that of adults in this respect. As previously stated, membership of both the Church Universal and the local assembly comes by means of a spiritual new birth in Christ. Children, before this conversion to Christ, cannot be considered in the proper sense members of either. Subsequent to new birth, regardless of what age this occurs at, they become full, and potentially, functioning members of both. There is, of course, still the need to develop into spiritual maturity, just as any adult who becomes a new born babe in Christ. Jesus said: **“Suffer (allow) little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me.”** (Mat.19:14). We must never underestimate the ability of any child to receive salvation. Children are the objects of God’s love, and, as such, need to hear without compromise, the Gospel of saving grace.

Is there any way at all in that a child may differ from an unconverted adult? Yes, in the situation where the child has at least one believing parent: **“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.”** (1 Cor. 7:14). The terms ‘sanctified’, and ‘holy’ are clearly not, in this instance, synonymous with salvation, because in verse 16 we read **“For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”** But a child with a believing parent(s) is, in some sense, a partaker with them of God’s *temporal* blessings. They are brought into contact with God’s people and His Kingdom.

So what of these children prior to their conversion, where do they fit into the picture of local church life? There is ample instruction concerning believing men and women and how they should **“behave”** in **“a church of the Living God”**, yet there is no instruction with respect to their children in a church meeting. Like all subjects that are not directly dealt with in scripture there must be some latitude in our approach. A simple logical surmising of this leads us to four possible options that are given here purely as food for thought.

Children whose parents attend the local church meeting could be:

1. Excluded from the *regular* church meeting.
2. Allowed to be present, whilst remaining silent.
3. Encouraged to be present, and given some focus/attention.
4. Provided with a separate facility.

It is not within the scope of this study to speculate upon these options. There are, doubtless, valid arguments that could be given for all, or combinations of the above, but without clear biblical backing we cannot be dogmatic about any of them.

If a church chooses either of the latter two options, this must not become an occasion to pander to fleshly, youthful desires. **“... for childhood and youth are vanity.”** (Eccl. 11:10). **“Flee also youthful lusts (desires).”** (2 Tim. 2:22). The church must not dilute the things spoken or sung to accommodate unspiritual youth. In our last section we touched upon the seriousness of role reversals for men and women. When worldly youth is allowed to be a governing factor in the

church meeting, it is a role reversal of the utmost folly. I have emphasized ‘fleshly’ and ‘worldly’ youth. To give balance here, it must also be mentioned that some younger people have been, and are, capable of immense spiritual maturity. When this is the case such young people must not be despised simply because of their youth. It is a blessing to discover the riches brought to the Church by some of the saints of the past who bore much fruit in the days of their youth.

In the final analysis with regard to children and their attendance at meetings, the one binding principle is that the elders in each local congregation are accountable for the oversight of everything within the assembly. This does not mean that they do not listen to and consider the wishes of other members but, in the absence of explicit biblical directives, it is their responsibility.

A serious biblical warning!

In respect of our last two themes: ‘*Women and Authority*’ and ‘*Children and the Church*’, we must take seriously a warning from the past. In the days of the Old Covenant, God sent various chastisements on the children of Israel as signs and warnings of His displeasure in their rebellions. Two such results of their erring are mentioned in Isaiah 3. **“And I will give children to be their princes, And babes shall rule over them.”** (vs.4) – **“As for My people, children are their oppressors, And women rule over them. O My people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, And destroy the way of thy paths.”** (vs.12). If, in a church, there exists the situation of female leadership and/or an overemphasis on youth culture, remember - it is a sign of God’s displeasure! As with the situation in the Garden of Eden, ultimate responsibility for these compromises will fall to the man. Men who are in authority will be held accountable if they allow the prevailing spirit of the world to become the standard for the churches in which God has made them overseers. Let us be warned in our age!

More on the local churches

As we consider the remainder of this study, we shall leave behind the subject of the Universal Church and seek to answer, from Scripture, some simple questions on the local church. What were the original principles that governed the gathering together of the early churches?

Where should a church meet?

At the outset of the book of Acts we find the Christians gathered together in the outer court of the Jewish Temple (Acts 2:46, 5:42). This should not be surprising, since we know that the earliest converts to Christ were all from the Jewish religion. As the gospel spread to include Gentiles, and as persecution came from Jewish leaders, there was a move away from the temple and from Jewish things. From then onwards, all further mention in Scripture of church gatherings indicates clearly that the New Covenant believers congregated in their various homes: (Acts 5:42, 8:3, Rom. 16:5, 1 Cor. 1:11, 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phil. v2). Nowhere is there any hint of special buildings dedicated to church meetings. The inspired Scriptures have furnished us with numerous examples, which are quite sufficient for answering this question. Without any ambiguity whatsoever we see that the normal, regular meeting place for a local church is in the believers' homes. Because of the nature of the Church we cannot rule out the possibility of some exceptional circumstance that might give rise to the need for a church to meet in some other place for a time. However, that which is shown to us at least seven times in God's inspired Word can only be considered the normal pattern.

As for reasons why we should meet in our homes: the first one is quite simply because this was the established principle of the New Covenant churches. In addition to this there are two types of benefit that are gained in following the scriptural pattern. The following thoughts are by no means exhaustive:

Some of the spiritual benefits

In the New Testament the Church is likened to a family; families do not usually congregate in large public buildings to share their most intimate moments. The local church meeting is not a public matter; it is for the family members*. The home environment is far more conducive to encouraging everyone to participate in a meeting, whereas a public building is more likely to inhibit the shy and less confident person. In our next section (*How should a church meet?*) we shall see that God desires to speak and work through all the members of His family. Also, people, especially our children, see that communion with God is not something we reserve for *special* occasions, in *special* places. Our mighty creator wants to be worshipped in our homes and to be at the centre of family life. Also, consider the impact this may have on our unbelieving neighbours, if praise and prayer were heard from houses all over the district!

* **Note:** Contrary to the popular practice of many of today's 'church systems', the early disciples did not encourage the unconverted to attend their meetings. All references to evangelisation in the New Testament teach that the Christians must '*go out*' into the world in order to preach the gospel. Paul allows for the possibility of an unbeliever coming in to a church meeting in 1 Cor 14, but we are not instructed to 'get them in' as a normal course of trying to reach the unconverted. In Acts 5, we read that God was working in signs and wonders and judgement. We all know what happened to Ananias and Sapphira! Following this incident we read in verse 13: "**And of the rest** (i.e. the unconverted) **durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.**" A church that is spiritually 'hot' will not usually be something attractive to unbelievers unless they are seriously seeking God.

Some of the practical benefits

There is no cost for the hire or purchase and maintenance of a building. All of the church's collection can go to the needs of others and not be consumed by the building. It eradicates the

confusion in the minds of the ‘untaught’ regarding what is the *Church*. Even many Christians still think of the building as being ‘the church’, some attributing to it Old Testament temple connotations. There is no burdensome ‘set-up’ routine to go through before and after meetings, particularly those in rented buildings. With a variety of homes to choose from there is greater flexibility in accommodating people geographically/practically. Of course some arguments could be put forward in defence of a larger, public building on a practical level, but either way, the spiritual benefits and adhering to the God given pattern are overwhelmingly the more important issues.

A note in conclusion

In conclusion of this I want to pre-empt any argument that says “the Church has developed further since those early days and it has since become necessary to evolve with it and accommodate everyone in large buildings.” When it was said that they (the Christians) had “**turned the world upside down**” it did not seem to imply that they were few in number! The New Testament writings cover a period of up to 60 years. If it was ever God’s intention that the Church should build or hire public buildings it could have been easily achieved over much of the known world within that time. Even 1 or 2 years is a very long time to get organised on a building program – particularly if God was with you on the project! No, God’s New Testament Church and His principles for it were entirely formed and complete within that time (See *Appendix 1 & 2*). Regardless of whatever else has been done, the Holy Spirit chose to record for us seven times that Christians met in their homes.

How should a church meet?

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ...” (Rom. 12:3-8).

“the head (Christ), from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” (Col. 2:19).

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

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:24,25).

“How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” (1. Cor. 14:26).

As previously mentioned, it is not the exclusive responsibility of a few select individuals to do “**the work of the ministry**”. It is quite clear from the above references, and many others contained in the New Testament, that every child of God is intended to be a contributor within the Body. There is an expectation that every believer present at the meeting will participate in some way. One of the effects of meeting this way is that it produces an alertness of every individual gathered in the meeting. It gives a strong sense of dependency on communion with God in order to be able to give aright. This focused, spiritual attention is not limited just to the duration of the meeting but affects the heart and mind both before and after, giving each one much to contemplate concerning his or her contribution. By this I do not mean the premeditation of our words, the important factor is the preparation of the messenger not the preparation of the

message. What Paul is describing in 1 Cor. 14:26 is not prepared messages but rather the spontaneous expression of the Spirit.

Let us look further on in the passage of Scripture in 1. Cor. 14. Verse 31 reads, **“for ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted”**. Let us here simply consider the principle of what is being said rather than getting caught up on the topic of prophecy. For the purpose of my point, we will think of the term ‘prophecy’ as being equated with any oral contribution to a meeting, such as in all of the above quotations. If it were simply the *hearing* of such a word that brings the ‘learning’ (ministry to the understanding) and ‘comforting’ (ministry to the spirit) then it would only require that one person should exercise any oral gift in the meeting, or perhaps even a few people for variety, but no - Paul says, **“ye may all ...”** In other words, it is not the hearing only that edifies but also the active taking part. Even in the realm of natural things we know that, if a person teaches something to others, that message is more firmly imprinted in the mind of the one teaching. How much more so is this a principle in spiritual things. Also, each person has his or her own unique personality that comes through in their participation, even as the various books of the Bible frequently affirm the same truths, but in different ways.

There are two keynotes I would like to mention here concerning *how* a believer makes his or her contribution to a meeting. Firstly, it should be **“with simplicity”** (Rom. 12:8). There is no need to add ‘religious’ tones to our voices, nor should we adopt the mannerisms of others whom we may esteem. God desires many sons, all uniquely showing forth the image of *His Son*. He does not want us to be clones of one another. Secondly, we must remain **“within our measure”** (Eph. 4:7). Where the Bible talks of us having a ‘measure’ it simply means limitations. The warning is to be careful not to exceed these so that we do not fall foul of the ‘roaring lion’.

In what ways then may a Christian verbally contribute to a meeting? First of all, in all of the various ways already contained in the quotations at the beginning of this section. One may add to these; prayer, praise, the reading of Scripture, personal testimony and perhaps others. The key principle here being that we gather together in order to **“build one another up in our most holy faith”**. The encouragement to all is to participate at some point, in one or more of these ways. It is not making a legalistic rule that every individual must say something in order for the meeting to be considered complete. This would be rigid and ritualistic and would not create an environment of true freedom. The atmosphere of a meeting should be both reverent and joyful, there should be fear and liberty - **“Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty”** (2 Cor. 3:17). The Greek word here means (by implication) ‘freedom of access to God’. In saying ‘fear’ I mean godly reverence, which is shown by people taking care not to use this liberty as a platform for the flesh.

This common sharing [GK. KOINONIA] principle of meeting is what I am referring to in this study where I have used the terms, the ‘normal/regular’ church meeting. This does not imply that there is not liberty in every congregation for the elders to arrange many types of meeting with various purposes, such as for: prayer, teaching, evangelism etc, but meetings that take any other form than the above mentioned, must only be in *addition to* the regular [fully KOINONIA] church meeting and must never replace it.

The norm in so many situations is for the church meeting to be ‘man led’. First of all a ‘worship leader’, usually a musician, leads the congregation in singing etc. Next it is the turn of the ‘minister/pastor’ to give his ‘sermon’. All this combines to make what people refer to as a ‘church service’. The concept of the religious service has no place in this Covenant where every individual should function spiritually as a priest. A ‘service’ is when something is done for you. There is no two-class structure in the Church - the *doers* and the *done to*. The worship leader and choir/musicians* are all practices adopted from the Old Covenant. The *Old Testament* was of an entirely different order from the *New* with regard to all of its ordinances and practices. All

of the rituals and practices from the Old Covenant have, according to the writer to the Hebrews, **“passed away”** (Heb. 8:13) and should no longer be a part of the New Testament era. The believer, under the New Testament, has been brought into sonship and does not need to come to God through any intermediary or ritual.

***Note:** Nowhere in the New Testament are we told to ‘worship’ God with musical instruments. [Please read *Note on worship*’ under the section on *What is the purpose of the churches*’ for further explanation of what is fundamentally meant by the word ‘worship’]. However, equally we are not told that the use of musical instruments for any purpose is forbidden. We have already seen that *‘singing’* and *‘making melody’* are New Testament means for God’s people to praise Him and encourage one another (Col. 3:16) & (Eph. 5:19). Of course singing can be done a-cappella and there is absolutely no reason why it shouldn’t be. However, if a church does choose to have some musical accompaniment, it must be just that – *accompaniment*, not a means of ‘leading’ or dominating the meeting. Anything other than simple accompaniment would detract from the KOINONIA principle of meeting. We need to be acutely aware too that, as with any gift used by anyone in the Church, if the person using such a gift is not walking with God in a crucified life it will minister death to the spirit and feed the flesh instead!

Church order

“Objection!” I hear. The Bible says **“... Let all things be done decently and in order”** (1 Cor. 14:40). To some minds the only concept of a total participation meeting is total chaos. This notion presupposes that if a human being does not entirely direct the proceedings then no one will. “Is there not danger involved with churches meeting in this way?” - “Yes”, is the simple answer, but it is not our place to reorganise the churches in order to give the *appearance* of spiritual stability. If there is danger involved in abandoning ourselves to God and His Holy Spirit in this way, it cannot be compared with the detriment caused by departing from the New Testament pattern. The above quotation is Paul’s ending to a detailed discourse that sets out the manner of church meetings in the way I am describing here.

The true Author of a meeting is the Holy Spirit. He gives men **“utterance”**, and **“moves”** them to speak, or to keep silent, - see Acts 2:4 and 2 Pet.1:21. Jesus himself is in the midst of the gathering - Mat.18:20 and Psalms 22:22 (this psalm is all prophetic of Him). The Father is the one to whom, essentially, we direct our praise and worship - John 4:23, but also remember John 5:23. Ultimately, the *Three* are *One*, but the essence is this: it should be *from God, through God, to God*.

Though we are all sons and all have the Spirit, this does not mean that we are all fully mature in spiritual things by any means. Therefore we are given three specific guiding factors with regard to the keeping of order in a church meeting. **1 Cor. 14** gives us much of this guidance. This is not at all surprising since one of the reasons for which Paul was writing to this church was because there had been to some extent a breakdown of order.

- ❖ **Vs. 32** tells us: **“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”**. This means that as God fills our hearts we are not compelled to speak out at that very moment, if at all. The Holy Spirit resides in every born-again believer and part of His fruit is self-control. This not only means control of obviously sinful desires but it is the control of everything within us. This includes all of our thoughts, ideas and potential contributions of spiritual things.
- ❖ In **vs. 27 & 29** we are told that a person’s contribution should be limited to two or three times. This more specifically relates to the bringing of *prophecy* but we have already seen that there is some underlying principle here, which can be readily applied to all of our contributions in a church gathering. I am only suggesting the application of the principle not necessarily the figure of two or three, but it should be obvious to all, including the one continually speaking when someone is taking the floor too often. This is a temptation as much to seasoned believers as to the less mature. Some less mature believers may ‘rush-in’ wherever there is a space. A more mature person may try to ‘step-in’ in order to fill an awkward silence. Thankfully, being perfect at it is not what it is all about - He knows that we are but dust! Seeking to please God from a pure heart and motive is far more important.

- ❖ For the occasions when an individual, or even the whole meeting could be heading more directly ‘off-course’ we have (hopefully) some mature God-given leadership. This whole topic is inextricably linked with our earlier considerations of ‘*Authority in the churches*’. The elders have many functions in a local church and these responsibilities are by no means limited solely to the times of gathering together. However, in the context of the meetings part of the role of the elders is to act as ‘*overseers*’. When necessary, they must direct, redirect, correct, instruct, etc. yet remain as a part of the meeting and not the focus. This place is given exclusively to God. Christ must be pre-eminent in all things. A church meeting where the Holy Spirit is the author of all said and done will always leave us with the imprint of Christ on our hearts and minds, not that of any man. Let every elder beware of the danger of falling into the sin of Diotrophes - “... *who loveth to have the pre-eminence among them ...*” (3 Jn. 9).

Final considerations

As well as the various general contributions to a meeting there is, of course, a place for teaching and preaching by those whom God has gifted for this task. There is nothing in the New Testament saying that this is the job of just one person in a church. For many good reasons, it is much more profitable for the growth of the assembly if this ministry has as many genuinely gifted participants as possible. It is the elders’ responsibility before God as to whom they ‘allow’ or ‘disallow’ to teach in the church.

It would be too large a task to try to elucidate on every fine point on the subject of the ‘KOINONIA’ principle of meeting. We are dealing with the movings of the Holy Spirit and we cannot dictate exactly where or how the ‘Wind’ blows. All that has been touched upon above is consistently encouraged throughout the New Testament and is ultimately intended to be a platform for the ‘Voice of God’ in our midst.

What size should a church be?

We know that the church in Jerusalem rapidly grew into the thousands and was still referred to as one church. No wonder there started to arise some logistical problems! But the church at Jerusalem was not representative of the norm as churches began to spread across the world – see ‘*Appendix 2*’. Before we seek to tackle the question of growth in a church what about a minimum number necessary to form a church. This has already been dealt with in the section entitled ‘*What is the purpose of the churches*’. In summary of what was touched upon there: Jesus said: “... *where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Mat. 18:20). To have Jesus in the midst is surely sufficient to minimally constitute a church. The churches of Galatia were called *churches* before there was any development of elders in them. We have already seen that it is not essential to have any ‘office’ filled in order to be considered a church. I do not say that we only want churches as small in number as two or three people, nor would we want the churches to remain undeveloped and not reach a stage where there is a need for elders. I am merely starting with an absolute minimum that would still allow for some sort of expression of a church in extreme circumstances.

What about a maximum? We cannot be too precise in seeking to answer this question but there are two restraining factors on the size a church can grow to if the New Testament pattern is to be followed:

1. Where a church meets. As we have already seen, the Christian meeting place for God’s New Covenant people is in houses. I don’t know the exact dimensions of an average house in the days of the early Church, or if the believers used some courtyard area of the house, but this clearly implies some kind of restriction on the size a church could grow to.

2. How a church meets. We have also seen that the regular assembly meeting involves the participation of everyone present, or at least there must be the potential for this to happen. This would not be logistically possible with too large a number of people, or even audibly possible with too large a building.

The New Testament shows us much about the early churches but we are not given a specific example of a church's numerical development after that of Jerusalem. However, it should not be too difficult to arrive at some kind of logical conclusion based upon the restricting factors already mentioned and upon the principles on which life, especially spiritual life, is built. Both in the natural and in the spiritual realm, we have come to learn that decrease is a necessary process for increase - ***“Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”*** (Jn. 12:24). A church is intended to be an ever-developing organism. Like a healthy cell in the developing human body, it grows, matures, and then – changes all the laws and structures of nature in order to adapt to its new size? - **No!** When it is fully ripe it divides itself into two healthy cells, which in turn, go on to do the same. It would be absurd to take the approach that whenever the Lord blesses a church in adding many souls that we then have to leave the New Testament pattern in order to accommodate everyone!

I am told that this divide and grow principle is the practice of many churches in Communist China. It is interesting to note that under persecution, churches often revert to the simplicity of New Testament practices. I have not known this to be the practice of any church that I have been personally acquainted with. On the other hand, I have heard, sadly, many accounts of the dividing of congregations that were painful, unwanted experiences. For this, we blame either man or the devil, but have we considered that this could be God speaking to us on this issue? If we were to divide ourselves sensitively, according to God's leading, then perhaps we might not need to be scattered like those at Babel. The way of the flesh is always to build big and what we think is strong. The spiritual way is always to hold everything with an open hand before God.

Whenever, however any new assembly comes into being, it must be remembered that, ultimately, it is a *'planting of the Lord'*. It is a new cell in *The Body* (the Universal Body). It is not an extension of any other cell (local church). Co-operation (fellowship) between the cells is wholesome and good, but we must always obey the first law of *The Body*, which is; the *Head* controls all parts directly. There is no delegation of this authority; one cell is not placed in charge of another. Every assembly answers directly to God. They are all His churches.

Fellowship

The Community of the Church

As we approach the end of this study, we must keep in mind one more vital aspect of the principles of church life. Our 'fellowship/communion', one with another should not exist, solely in church meetings. We see in the Bible that the people of God shared their lives together in every way, both in things spiritual and things temporal. To begin with, we will simply quote some Scripture that reveals their attitude towards material possessions:

“And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” (Acts 2:44,45).

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.” (Acts 4:32-35).

Note: it was those who were possessors of lands - plural, and houses - plural that sold these in order to benefit others. It was not the case that everybody gave up his own dwelling and lived in one large 'commune'. However, the supply of one another's earthly needs was considered to be of the utmost importance.

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10).

Now let's move on to see another vital element that is part practical but much more a means of meeting spiritual need:

“Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Pet. 4:9,10). ***“Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality.”*** (Rom. 12:13). ***“A Bishop must be ... a lover of hospitality ...”*** (Tit. 1:8). ***“A Bishop then must be ... given to hospitality.”*** (1 Tim. 3:2).

Throughout the Bible there is a persistent exhortation to continually open our homes to one another. Every believer is exhorted to ***“use hospitality”***. It is further interesting to note that this is a vital qualification for elders. In the above quote from 1Tim.3:2 the following verse says ***“...not given to wine...”*** In this sense, ***“given”*** means *addicted, cannot do without, an overwhelming urge*. This is the extent to which Christians should be ***“given”*** to hospitality.

When God first poured out His Spirit in Jerusalem, we are told that the Christians met daily. Whether or not the churches always had a daily 'meeting' we shall not take up here (see appendix 2) but, perhaps it is more in the context of regular hospitality that we can understand how the members of the Church are encouraged to ***“...exhort one another daily...”*** (Heb 3:13) - written some thirty or so years later. This most intimate sharing of our lives is an absolutely vital part of the fellowship of the whole Church, not just our local congregation. We must always remember that first and foremost we are members of *the* worldwide family of God and never become exclusively 'locked-in' to our own local situation. Provided that we do not turn this genuine hospitality into religious formality, it is a very powerful means of the world seeing that we are HIS CHURCH.

Conclusions

Overworked pastors, underdeveloped Christians

One of the central themes of this study is the section on ‘*The pastoral system*’. We have already mentioned Diotrophes who wanted to be the focus of attention in one congregation. We have seen also another reason for the development of this non-biblical pattern, which is the reluctance of individual believers within a congregation to spiritually participate in the life of the church. We saw an outstanding example of this reluctance to communicate direct with God from Exodus 20:19 - “*they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.*”

The pastoral system often produces undeveloped members who are overly dependent on the *one* who does everything for them. One consequence of this is that it frequently becomes a massive burden for the *one* on whom people are so dependent. It further results in producing underdeveloped Christians who are often unable to find answers for themselves in prayer and in the Scriptures. This system by its very nature tends to interfere with the all important New Covenant principle of every individual believer being deeply dependant on communion with God. Whether or not the ‘pastor’ preaches this personal relationship, this unbiblical structure hinders many people from entering in to it.

Arguments for the pastoral system

Is there in the Bible anything that could help support belief in this system? The following are five explanations I have heard as a basis for this structure:

1. In the book of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches are all addressed to - “... *the angel of the church at...*” - This means the pastor.

The word ‘angel’ here (ANGELOS) is the same Greek word used in every other instance where ‘angel’ occurs in the New Testament. Was it a *pastor* who visited Mary? Was it a ‘pastor’ who delivered Peter out of gaol? Does the writer to the Hebrews mean “we may entertain *pastors* unawares?”

It is possible that the use of the word angel (messenger), in this instance, could be in some way figurative. However it would be inappropriate to formulate from this a system that is inconsistent with the plainly revealed truths of the rest of the New Testament. Also, if this were true, then would it not seem extraordinary that *the pastor* is by-passed in all of the other New Testament letters? The epistles are addressed to: *the saints* (all believers), *the bishops* (i.e. the elders) and *deacons* etc, but never to ‘*the pastor*’. If such a role existed, it would have been rude and inappropriate to not even mention ‘*God’s appointed leader*’!

2. James was the ‘leading elder’ at Jerusalem. This is so because he is mentioned several times and gave a summarising word in a meeting of the apostles and elders on a particular matter (Acts 15:6-22).

First of all, such a term (*leading elder*) is never used or even alluded to with reference to James or any other elder. Secondly, in a conversation/debate situation where the final goal is truth, there will often be someone who gives a final summary to the discussion. That someone may not always be the same person on each occasion, but even if it were, this would not create a new office in the Church.

3. There were elders - plural in each city, but only one per ‘house meeting’ in that city.

It is true that Titus was told to appoint elders in every *city*. However, this does not make clear the more exact distribution of those elders, but in Acts 14:23 we read: ***“And when they had ordained them elders (plural) in every church (singular)”***. The view of ‘one-city one-church’ is a conceivable argument from Scripture. However, we have to realise the huge changes in size and population of what we call a city today. But even if this were to be applied as a principle then it still does not lead to all that goes hand-in-hand with the pastoral system.

4. Someone has to be in charge, and preferably someone qualified.

Someone one is simply human reasoning, not what the Word of God teaches. It is true that nearly every, if not all, earthly organisations have a singular ‘managing director’ figure to oversee them. God’s EKKLESIA is not a part of this world’s system.

As for the necessity of trained people to run churches, this also is not based upon any biblical argument. However this does lead to an opportunity to consider another spiritual truth of the Kingdom of God. Firstly, the emphasis on a biblical elder is character more than ability. Secondly, the abilities that are required cannot be taught by any man. All genuine functions in the Church of God are a gift from God; they cannot be learnt by theological training. Having been endowed of God for some task, it is true that a person can grow in this ministry. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher, all subsequent ‘training’ is provided by Him. This does not negate the need of others within the Church from whom we can learn, but the Body is fitted together by Him. He joins us together with the right people, at the right place, at the right time, in order to provide us with the lessons we need to learn, when we need them.

Note: We must not despise academic learning. The Church is indebted to those whom God has enabled to further His Word in this manner. For example, we need Bible translators and it is a blessing to have Christians who are well taught in history, archaeology, the sciences and so on. But academic learning is not at all sufficient to make a man a minister of Jesus Christ.

5. Israel had Moses, Joshua and then a King; therefore each church must have one overall leader.

In the realm of Old Testament analogy, surely Moses (God’s mediator), Joshua (Hebrew form of Jesus – saviour) and kingship all speak of our Lord Jesus! There is no such warrant to apply these ‘types’ to the subject of leadership in the Church. However, this does lead us to reflect on another lesson of God’s dealings with His people:

David, God’s King?

In so many situations (pastoral system churches) it does seem as though, under the circumstances, ‘such and such’ is the right man for the job. If this system is in opposition to biblical precedents, then how can it be that God still takes an interest and continues to bless, speak and minister to hearts? The answer is - the Father heart of our loving, merciful God. He is slow to chide and swift to bless. We see this very principle at work in Israel’s history and their desire for a king.

In Deut. 17:14 it was predicted that, when Israel would come into the Promised Land that the people would say: ***“... I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me.”*** Knowing that they would be unrelenting about this, in response, Moses said ***“Thou shalt in anywise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose.”*** I encourage you to read all of 1 Sam. Chapters 8 and 12, where this whole scenario will become abundantly clear; it was not the highest purpose of God to give them an earthly king. We will not pause to consider the reign of Saul, but simply note that it all turned out disastrously even as Samuel had warned them. However, our merciful God did not abandon them, He gave them David. God does not usually reject us at the first falling-away from His statutes. We know also, that God works all things to bring about the good of His people. Thus does He often do in the multitude of situations where

His people will not even consider being different from the others around, God, in His longsuffering, does not abandon His people. Yes, God can still speak in these situations; He can speak through an ass if necessary - (Num. 22:28). But our commission as the children of God is not to say, *“Well, God uses this or that and therefore we do it that way.”* We are commanded to obey the revealed will of God, which He has preserved for us in Holy Scripture, preserved for us even at the expense of the blood of His saints!

There are other reasons why many churches may appear to be ‘successful’ whilst operating the pastoral system. One is, that it could be due to the leadership of a genuinely gifted person who, whilst continuing an inherently faulty practice, may none-the-less be ministering in the life-flow of God. On the other hand, though a church may have quenched the Spirit of God, it still continues, *outwardly*, relatively unaffected because it has a well-rehearsed method and/or an industrious ‘program’!

A lesson from Sardis

“These things saith He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou has a name that thou livest, and art dead.” (Rev. 3:1).

I hope this study has shown without doubt that God has given, and preserved for us a pattern for His Church. But as with every biblical truth, we can still try and pursue the establishment of it *in the flesh*. Those looking on from the outside evidently thought of Sardis as a live, spiritual church. Perhaps those within that assembly thought of themselves in that light. On the surface at least, they must have appeared to have had things right. But the assessment of Jesus of them was: *“Thou art dead!”*

Does this mean that we may as well give up any attempt to fashion things on the outside according to the right way, for fear of being hypocrites? Of course not. There is no alternative for those who want to please God in every way. However we do need to have hearts that match our minds. The correct outward form of church-life, in and of itself, cannot be equated with spirituality. It is quite possible to follow all of the ‘form’ and be as dead as Sardis!

A lesson from the Tabernacle

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it.” (Psalms 127:1)

We must be ever conscious that although the Holy Scripture provides us with the pattern for the building, the process must be carried out through a spiritual enabling from God. Bezaleel and Aholiab were masters of their trade but they still had to be filled with the Spirit of God and wisdom to be properly qualified to work according to God’s design – see Exodus 31:1-6.

“Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.” (Psalms 127:1)

Having established the ‘*Tabernacle of God*’ we mustn’t ever think the work complete. The building is only a means to an end. The whole purpose of the construction of the Tabernacle was in order that it might provide a suitable framework for the ‘*Service of God*’. This does not mean that the Tabernacle does not need to be maintained, but having established a work in the Spirit it must then be entirely committed to Him to keep it.

A Short Summary

This work is by no means an exhaustive study on Church-life. Even if it were, no such thing could

be treated as a *how to* manual. Praise God, He has preserved for us a trustworthy record of the Church in the New Testament.

These Church-life principles are intended to work as a whole. They will not, by and large, produce much benefit if only some of them are applied in isolation from the fuller picture. The New Testament furnishes us with a clearly defined ‘wineskin’, which God has designed as His vessel for the spiritual life of Christ – the *New Wine*. As for any details not mentioned in Scripture, there must be liberty, only, within the bounds of sound, biblical principles.

The next question to be asked is of course “can churches today be established along these lines?” I do not think that existing established systems are, in the main, likely to alter. I will say a little more about this in the next section. For a new church it should not prove difficult if it is known from the outset that this is the intended pattern for development. However, there may be strong criticisms, or worse from those within the existing establishments. It will require an unswerving belief that the New Testament teachings are as applicable today as they were when they were first written (see *Appendix 1*). I wish to make it clear that my desire for this return to New Testament simplicity is not primarily one of correctness of form, but an aspiration to know afresh the unhindered movings of God in HIS CHURCH.

What Next?

This following section contains a few of my own thoughts, feelings, reasonings and observations. Whether or not these are agreed with it should not in any way affect the straightforward facts of the Scripture study that has gone before.

Two Kingdom Parables

Just before I give any kind of personal assessment of how I think things could work out it is necessary first to set the bounds of possibilities in a realistic way. It is also always advisable when trying to plot a course ahead that we first pinpoint exactly which direction we are coming from. The ‘kingdom parables’ of Matthew chapter thirteen, if understood properly, will give us great insight into the subject of the Church and something of its course through history. I refer you first of all to this parable of the mustard tree.

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

(Mat 13:31, 32)

You will no doubt know that faith “as a grain of mustard seed” can grow mighty if God gives it increase. Such is the story of the early Church. Within days of the Spirit’s coming at Pentecost thousands were being swept into the kingdom, within a few short years the kingdom was spreading all over the world. A cursory reading of this parable may lead us to think that this great tree, grown from just a tiny seed is somehow enhanced in its stature as the birds take rest in it. However, the presence of the ‘birds of the air’ should alert us to the fact that Jesus was warning His people of something that would pervade His Church on earth. The ‘birds of the air’ in these kingdom parables were not harmless, feathery friends. They are not figurative of some company who take comfort and find salvation in the presence of God’s people. On the contrary, they are the agents of the wicked one, permeating, infiltrating and taking their place among those who are the real Spirit-born sons of the Lamb. If we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture we can see this quite clearly from the first, key parable in this chapter (the parable of the sower, vs. 3-23). Birds are used in this instance, in part, because of their association with ‘the air’ and therefore with the ‘prince of the power of the air’ (Eph 2:2). Their presence in the mustard tree is indicative of an unholy invasion of God’s kingdom on earth.

The parable of the wheat and the tares shows us the same ‘invasion’ principle:

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.”

(Mat 13:24-28)

There are the *real* and the *look-alike* believers all mixed up together in the same field. The presence of the tares makes the field look a whole lot better stocked than it really is. Their

numbers are so pervasive and their appearance can so much resemble the wheat that the only remedy is to leave them to grow until the time of harvest. The wheat and the tares will all be separated out at this time.

In these two teachings we see a common parabolic meaning. Jesus was warning His disciples that although His kingdom on earth would be established and grow there would also be an unholy presence mingling in with His Church. One outcome of this would be that this would give the impression that the size and extent of the Church is much bigger than it really is. The figures given for the number of Christians in various places around the globe are grossly inflated by the presence of these tares among the wheat. The percentages of wheat and tares will vary enormously from church to so-called church. So widely in fact that it will be anything from 100% wheat to 100% tares.

The reason I mention these parables at this stage is so we can maintain a realistic outlook of what we can and can't expect to happen in the Church. Before we can sensibly contemplate 'what next?' we must have some sort of realistic grasp of what has already come to pass and that which has been prophesied by our Lord Himself concerning the things of His Church. In *Appendix 3* I have recommended a book that will make clearer from Church history the picture of these two opposing forces at work in the Church, which will continue to co-exist until the time of the harvest.

Now here is the relevant point we need to see before any of us should set our aims too high. Even where the balance of wheat and tares in a church is as much as 50/50 it would be nigh impossible for that whole group of people to begin to function as a normal New Testament church. Participating in prayer, praise and exhortation is as natural as a babe sucking the breast for those who are truly born of God's Spirit. However, for the one who is merely a look-alike tare such simple expression of fellowship with God is not possible. That is, not possible in a life-giving way that is needed to sustain a genuinely biblical church. (I realise that such can be mimicked and learned outwardly but it will never minister the life Christ to the hearers).

So then, many folk (I am not even going to hazard a percentage!) within these institutional settings would be quite incapable of playing their part in sustaining a biblically operated church. Not because they just haven't been taught but because the necessary life of the Holy Spirit, on which a true biblical church utterly depends, is simply not there within them. The development of unbiblical churches was not primarily due to some doctrinal misunderstandings about the apostle's teachings on the Church. They came into existence very early in the story of the Church due to spiritual decline.

There are many reasons for the decline and many motives, both good and bad, were the cause of men beginning to reorganize early Church practices. I trust you will see much more of this if you decide to take my book recommendation in *Appendix 3*. The point here is that few traditional churches would be able to easily convert to a more biblical model of church because it is not solely an issue of doctrinal understanding. These institutions have become the resting place of many 'birds of the air'. They are not about to change their habits just because someone shows them that they are not behaving 'biblically'.

The 'Unchurched'

For all the reasons gone before I am not about to offer any suggestion on how to convert from the 'pastoral system model' to the New Testament pattern. It is most unlikely that many well-established traditions will ever undergo a complete transformation. I am inclined to believe that it

is much more likely that any such return to these New Testament principles for Church-life will be made by those who are considered to be the misfits and outcasts from the existing institutions.

I am aware that there are many Christians who are currently ‘unchurched’. That is to say, they do not belong to/attend any existing established group in their area. This does not mean that all such folk are without any form of Christian fellowship entirely. The reasons for being in such a position undoubtedly vary. Some may well be in neglect but others are in such circumstances solely for conscience sake. In the case of the latter group the reasons for this are wide-ranging. An overwhelming desire to meet in a biblical manner is just one of the issues but it must be recognized that there are many other difficult scenarios in this day and age too.

The sweeping tide of ecumenicalism is just one of the more obvious issues of the day. Those who for conscience sake have no intention of signing up with this movement are increasingly swept aside and considered flies in the ointment. However, just as it was in Elijah’s day, God always has His remnant. There are still ‘seven thousand’, figuratively speaking, who have not bowed the knee to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him (see 1 Kings 19). This issue alone has left a number of conscientious brothers and sisters bewildered and sometimes seemingly alone. Although there are still some strongholds of ‘traditional Protestantism’ most of these have no intention of leaving their own traditions and meeting as biblical churches. To be non-ecumenical and a believer in biblical church leaves one in a very small camp for starters. That is before any of the many other issues of the age are addressed!

Because of various difficulties and for diverse reasons there are, it seems, a growing numbers of ‘dissenters’ from the established traditions. Some may have already found refuge in small groups but others have found themselves much more alone, at least at a local level. Such folk must now answer a direct accusation from the Scripture. It is a Scripture already quoted within this study:

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;” (Heb 10:25)

So, how do you answer such a straight, scriptural accusation? I’ll tell you. First we need to see a little more of the context of these words:

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another:” (Heb 10:24, 25)

The first point to make here is that a believer needs to be extremely cautious before levelling any such charge against one of God’s children. The word ‘forsaking’ implies ‘negligence’. Negligence is first and foremost an attitude of the heart. Only God ultimately knows all that is in a person’s heart. I am not saying that there aren’t any negligent Christians in this matter but as I have already mentioned there are many in these circumstances for no other reason than that their consciences have been exercised by the Holy Spirit and they cannot be party to any one or more of the many serious compromises that are being made.

Secondly, you will notice that this exhortation is in the context of ‘one another’. You should have by now a very clear understanding that the principle that guides the behaviour of New Testament churches is that of ‘one another’. We saw this most clearly in the section entitled *‘How should a church meet?’* If a church does not operate on this ‘one another’ level then it is missing its entire purpose in being together. We noted earlier in the study that churches do not meet primarily in order to worship God. The biblical reason for the ‘assembling together’ is so that we might edify (build up) one another. If I am not built up by the activities of an assembly and I myself have no liberty to edify my brother and sister in Christ then the whole gathering is little more than a

religious charade. Albeit I acknowledge that God in His infinite long-suffering may yet grant some blessing in these circumstances (see *'David, God's King?'*).

Now we come to the phrase "*assembling of ourselves together.*" A biblical 'assembling together' is what has been described in this study. Church 'services', be they of the traditional reformed nature or the modern charismatic style DO NOT biblically constitute an 'assembling together'. It may be that in the ordinary sense you have a number of people gathered together in one place at one time, but in spiritual matters it is not the outward physical observance of a thing that is most important. Biblically speaking, an 'assembling together' does not take place in the vast majority of those buildings that people call 'churches' (this may even include many of the meetings held in houses!).

This means that the accuser who stands and quotes Hebrews 10:25 is at the same time in all probability one who rarely, if ever, has known what it is to biblically 'assemble together'. Therefore dear brother or sister who, for one reason or another, with sincere conscience before God and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, has left the institutions of religion, you may with humble confidence answer any who may accuse you in quoting Hebrews 10:25. Your answer is Romans 14:4: "*Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.*" This Scripture goes on to say more for your encouragement... "*Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*"

The Pattern of Recovery

If I am correct in my assessment of our day, that the love of many has grown cold, I must be clear to state something further. This 'seven thousand', those who are, in spirit, faithful to our Lord, also just as surely resides 'in the midst' of many of these existing establishments. Let not those who have 'come out' act as judges upon those who continue to reside in these places. Only God can judge their hearts. The integrity and godliness of those who really love the Saviour is not at all in question but it is for these people to keep watching and listening to what the Spirit is saying unto the churches. If there is change all well and good, but if not, they must be ready to move on if ever they should hear their Master say, "*Come out from among her my people and be ye separate.*"

The former group, those who are already for conscience sake separated from that which is *called* the Church, can be likened to Abraham "*who went out not knowing whither he went.*" For we walk by faith and not by sight. Often the Lord will only say, "Go" and we must march on His orders. The rest may only become clear after we have obeyed His first command.

The latter group, those who know that the place that they are in is far from the Lord's best but for the time being feel called to be there, could be likened to those who are '*passing through Jericho*' (Luke 19:1). Jericho was a cursed city that should never have been rebuilt (Joshua 6:26). But it was! And there it stood at the time when Jesus came into this world and He still deigned to pass through it in the course of following His Father's will. Yes, there are instances, I know, when a situation looks all wrong but God may put you there for a time and season.

There is a third group among the genuine sons of God and these no doubt count for the majority. They continue in the systems they are in quite unaware that they are unbiblical, having never even stopped to question them. In some cases they have considered just a little and are ardent believers that the particular system that they belong to is somehow the one God established despite it being so different from the pattern of the churches in the New Testament. These are in the 'enchanted land' (Ref: *The Pilgrim's Progress* – John Bunyan), dull, sleepy and oblivious to the dangers that lay around them at this time. I do not expect many of these to comprehend or take any interest in a study such

as this. I only hope and pray that a great ‘awakening’ will dawn for them.

So what can we expect? From examination of Church history I see a pattern that has often emerged:

1. God begins to awaken hearts and minds of believers in various places and causes them to see some aspect of truth, which needs restoring to the Church. Never a new revelation just a simple restoration of New Testament principles. This awakening goes hand-in-hand with a stirring of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.
2. When those, who see this truth, have spent some while trying to convince others, but largely without success, they eventually, for conscience sake, separate from the ‘mainstream’.
3. At God’s appointed time He brings these separated brethren together, as drawn by the Spirit, and they begin to take great comfort and joy in finding those of like-heart and mind.
4. At this stage the second group begin to come. Those who have to some extent seen the truth but were unwilling to go out not knowing ‘wither they are going’. They can now see a visible alternative to the system they are in and so make up a ‘second wave’, as it were, in joining with those first ‘dissenters’.
5. Eventually, even a few of the sleepy ones awake to what God is doing and then they move on.
6. Somewhere in the midst of all of this we can hope to see a response from God to the obedience of His people – blessing, outpouring, salvation of souls and an increase of salt and light in the relevant nations. *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* (2Ch 7:14)
7. During this time, some of the tares begin to arrive and so the whole cycle of decline in a ‘movement’ begins again.
8. Also, somewhere in the midst of these events, Satan raises up a complete counterfeit of the whole thing and does all that he can to discredit and bring persecution on those moving with God.

My eight points above are undoubtedly an oversimplification of things. There are all kinds of factors and powers at work intermingling with this course of events but it certainly seems to account for much of Church history.

For Better or for Worse!

Now, I need to make something very plain here. God has given us His Word that we should read it, believe it and obey it. Even if there is no great revival, no great comfort and fellowship for the few who desire this, even though the wells dry up and the present darkness deepens will YOU still walk in the things that God has shown you? I get the impression that many previous exponents of New Testament Church-life recovery have frequently tied this subject with the return of the Lord Jesus. A belief that when He comes there must be ‘a pure testimony’ for him to come for, a glorious and victorious army of overcoming saints. Whatever Old Testament prophecies are used to propound this idea it is not the plainly stated position of the New. In fact, Jesus said: *“when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8). This in itself is a not an absolute statement of anything but it would certainly seem from this and a number of New Testament passages that there is no guaranteed grand finale of revivals at the end. The question is are you prepared to be, if necessary, a lowly, downtrodden minority with little acknowledgement or respect from the ‘mainstream’ of so called Christianity?

I do not see a return to the New Testament Church pattern as being somehow intrinsically bound up with the coming of the Lord. Getting things ready for Him is not our business. Our business is

simply and always to do the things we are shown regardless of the outcome. Besides, Church history shows us that there have always been pockets of the Lord's people meeting more or less according to these principles. This is not a new thing. There is nothing new under the sun.

Up until this point there has never been a major, large-scale recovery of New Testament Church practices. Up until now it has always been a tiny remnant that has maintained New Testament simplicity. I have no personal expectation for something 'big' necessarily. Big or small that is entirely God's business. Our business is simply and always to obey the truth we have been shown. Not that which a man shows us but that to which the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts.

Big or small, whether the Lord is coming or tarrying, either way, my desire before God is that He please move afresh in our hearts and in our understanding at this time. May He especially draw together those who feel so alone in this and give us cause for great joy in these days as we find the blessing of meeting those of like heart and mind. We must continue to walk after the Spirit and not after the flesh. We know that we cannot, we must not even try to, manufacture this by our own efforts. He must speak, He must draw and He must build HIS CHURCH.

Appendix 1

Inspiration of Scripture

In the days of Jesus and His apostles and throughout the Bible's history, there were many things done, said and written. By God's guidance, a very select amount of that written material came to be understood by the Church as being 'Scripture'. We cannot here give full consideration to the processes and background of the compiling of the Bible. But what does need to be highlighted is that those writings that were acknowledged as being 'inspired' (literally, *God-breathed*) were understood to be, not only applicable to the church or individual to whom they were addressed, but also to every other church and Christian. This means that Holy Scripture was written for *all churches, in all places, at all times*.

The Bible encompasses many different phases of God's dealings with mankind. We need to be very clear in our understanding about which Covenant is applicable to us today. The Old Testament is still read by Christians because it is rich in history, prophecy, allegory and much more, but it is not *the Covenant* in which we live today (though it makes many forward looking references to it). The New Testament was written as a direct result of God commencing a *new covenant* (agreement) with His people. The period of time covered from the founding of the New Testament Church (on the day of Pentecost) until the close of the New Testament writings is nearly sixty years. If any of the principles of Church development were to have changed, this would have been a quite sufficient period for them to have done so. Whatever else has been said, done or written since, or even during that time, has not acquired the status of being preserved in the 'Inspired Book'.

Appendix 2

The basis for interpretation

We are given no authorization to imitate known practices and developments of the Church outside of the things recorded in Holy Scripture. However, this does not mean that there never was a developmental phase of the Church's existence. Herein lies a slight difficulty as, unlike its beginning, we cannot pinpoint a precise moment in time when the Church had become fully developed. We know that by the end of the New Testament writings every critical element of the Church's form and doctrine had been fully established upon the foundation laid down by the apostles. ***“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book”*** (Rev. 22:18).

In some ways there was a transitional phase concerning the change from the Old to the New Covenant: ***“In that He saith, a New Covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”*** (Heb. 8:13). The New Covenant technically began on the day of Pentecost, yet the writer to the Hebrews recognises that, in practice, there was a transitional process. In the same way, the outward pattern and form of the Church had to develop from its birth, at Pentecost, throughout this founding era.

On the day of Pentecost Peter said, ***“This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear”*** (Acts 2:32,33). The expression used here, in reference to the coming of the Holy Spirit – ***“shed forth”*** means to ‘gush out’, like the breaking of a dam. In this kind of ‘outpouring’ we see the mighty power of the waters, but it is not until a little further on before we can clearly see the course that the river is taking! Therefore, when we read of the practices of the newborn Church in its early years following Pentecost, we must always compare this with examples further on in the Church's life. That is, we need to examine all of the Book of Acts and the Epistles to see if a practice was continued and was not just the result of the initial ‘breaking of the dam’.

It is reasonable to conclude that at such ***“times of refreshing”*** (outpourings of God's Spirit), circumstances may be out of the ordinary for a while, but the Church has been given its blueprint for development for all time. The ‘God-breathed’, God-preserved’ Scriptures are the sole basis of authority for everything concerning **HIS CHURCH**.

Appendix 3

The Pilgrim Church

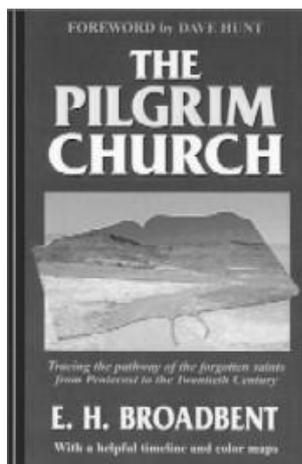
An original draft of this study was entitled ‘His *Hidden Church*’ in recognition that those who down the centuries have to varying degrees maintained simple church purity have often been an obscure, small and seemingly insignificant remnant. However, after further consideration I realise that although such has more often been the case it does not unequivocally presuppose that God may not at any time cause a larger scale return to these principles.

I would very much like to recommend some further reading to you. This book will be of especial interest to those who have a desire to know more of ‘real’ Church history. Although this book does not delve into all of the detail of the functioning of New Testament Churches it will, perhaps even more importantly, introduce you to some of those ‘pockets’ of people who have down the ages sought more or less to meet in accordance with these principles.

I do not claim that every group mentioned within this book met exactly thus. I do not claim that the author, Edmund Hamer Broadbent, would necessarily agree with every fine detail of this study. I have just read a mini biography of this man (Edmund Hamer Broadbent – saint and pioneer, *Recollections and Reflections* - G.H.Lang) and so far as I could see there was little to differ with in his methods of ‘apostolic’ ministry.

The many and varied churches he writes of are to me an evidence that I am not teaching anything new in this booklet. Neither is the aspiration for living, normal, New Testament churches something that should be reserved for some ‘end-time’ super-church. It has already been the practice of many in the past and is undoubtedly the practice of a few today.

The following is my own previously published review of this book – *The Pilgrim Church*.
(Published on the web site noted on the back cover of this booklet).



I first read this book some years ago. I think I’ve now read it three times. The period covered is from Pentecost to the early 1900’s. Yes it’s Church history and contains many names, dates and places, but it is more special than a simple account of facts and figures. Firstly, because it left me with a very distinct empathy with many of the peoples mentioned in the book and a sense of ‘I know who my true brothers and sisters in Christ were now’. It is full of accounts of many personal struggles and trials of faith, “and they loved not their lives unto the death.” I know that accounts of persecution can be very unsettling to some people but through it all you’re usually left with a great sense of awe and victory. It is not a book about persecution but that is unfortunately a part of the story. I have sometimes skipped over some of those parts having seen the general picture and just moved on with the story.

This book introduced me to many peoples, groups of churches and ‘movements’ I had not previously heard of at the time I first read it. As I say though, it is not a database of dry statistics. I’ve learnt through this that many of the ‘unknowns’ not included in ‘popular’ Church histories were actually the true and faithful ones in Christ. As I understand, these people such as, the Waldenses, Albigenses, Lollards and Bogomils (some of their names were given to them by their oppressors) and numerous others are often either overlooked in many Church history books or are painted in a bad light. Throughout the ages the ‘official Church’ refers to them as ‘heretics’ and considers them to be their bane. Such was the intensity of hatred for them that whole armies were

gathered and sent to wipe out entire populations in an attempt to ‘cleanse’ the ‘Church’ from these ‘vile corrupters’. Please don’t get the wrong impression here; the book spends much time in details of glorious salvations and outpourings of the Holy Spirit. There are times of peace and times of war, times of victory and times of defeat. It’s very ‘real’ and very objective.

How is that Broadbent’s account differs from many others then? He travelled extensively gathering what he could from various sources and directly from those who were descendants of ‘the pilgrim church’. He reads between the lines of the accounts given by ‘their enemies’, which of course would not paint them in any favourable light. There were some preserved, written records, which clearly expose the tyrannical behaviour of much of the ‘official’ Church. Interestingly, I recall reading somewhere that many of these have since ‘disappeared’ since Broadbent’s days. The recently (1999) reissued edition of *The Pilgrim Church* has an excellent forward by Dave Hunt. He also makes mention there of records no longer being in circulation. What makes this account so valuable is that it drew upon sources that were available in the Author’s day (he lived from 1861 – 1945), much of which does not seem to be now in circulation. This book is about ‘real’ Church history. It needs to be read right through and not kept solely for reference, but will do very nicely for that purpose afterwards.

Quotes from E. H. Broadbent

The following quotations from *The Pilgrim Church* are those that I found quoted at the back of the book I mentioned earlier: *Edmund Hamer Broadbent – saint and pioneer, Recollections and Reflections* - by G.H. Lang.

Its opening paragraph says:

“The New Testament has in itself the character of completeness, presenting, not the rudimentary beginning of a new era which requires constant modification and addition to meet the needs of changing times, but a revelation suited to all men in all times.”

The second page says:

“Events in the history of the churches in the time of the Apostles have been selected and recorded in the Book of Acts in such a way as to provide a permanent pattern for the churches. Departure from this pattern has had disastrous consequences, and all revival and restoration have been due to some return to the pattern and principles contained in the Scriptures.”

With regards to the local church he says:

“Each of these churches stands in direct relationship to the Lord, draws its authority from Him and is responsible to Him. There is no suggestion that one church should control another or that any organised union of churches should exist, but an intimate personal fellowship unites them.”

This final quote is from a friend of mine who made this statement in an apparently incidental way:

“The prerequisite for a return to first conditions is a return to first love.”

* * * * *

Glossary

There are two reasons for the necessity of this glossary:

1. Although the original writings of Scripture were wholly inspired of God it does not follow that every translation of the Bible meets that standard of perfection. Each translation has its own quirks. When the Authorized Version of the Bible was being produced the committee in charge were under obligation to use (or keep, in respect of revising earlier translations) such words as ‘church’, ‘bishop’, ‘office’ and such like. These terms had come to take on very distinct ecclesiastical, even social and political meanings by this time. Many of these words could have been translated into far more ‘ordinary’, every day terms. For the purposes of this study, instead of changing these words it was considered better to stick with them for the sake of consistency and hopefully make their meanings clear. Despite these obstacles the A.V. still has many favourable advantages, just one of which is that we are very fortunate in having a wealth of available dictionaries, concordances and the like especially for use with this version of the Bible.

2. Apart from the translators’ choice of words we have a much bigger problem of many biblical words and phrases being confused, misunderstood, and above all, persistently misused! It is, and no doubt will continue to be, a never-ending task to constantly define and restore the proper Scriptural meanings of many Bible terminologies. This glossary deals with some of the terms used in this study which are either potentially misleading in their translation and/or just plain misunderstood. Most of these are more clearly explained as they occur within the study. The glossary has been included simply to alert the reader to be careful not to assume the meaning of any of any of these terms. The table below gives their proper meanings as reflected by the original Greek and/or their obvious context and usage in the Authorized Version.

‘His Church’ table of terms

Bishop	Means an ‘overseer’. It is synonymous with the terms ‘elder’ and ‘overseer’ and possibly ‘pastor’ (see section on <i>‘the pastoral system’</i> for more on this). It never implies someone who oversees the other overseers.
Baptism	Means ‘immersion’. The believer is immersed ‘into’ two <i>things</i> (for want of a better word): 1. God, in the person of the Holy Spirit. 2. Water, as an expression or sign of the first. Paul states quite clearly that there is only “ <i>one (real) baptism</i> ” (Eph 4:5). Thus, as already said, the latter is simply the accompanying sign of the former. Whenever we read the word ‘baptism/baptize/baptized’ in Scripture we need to ask diligently, <i>into what?</i> Don’t just assume it means water.
Church	The Greek word is ECCLESIA. In simple terms it means a body of people. In the New Testament there is one occasion where it is used in reference to the entire nation of Israel (Acts 7:38). Apart from this once all other references are to God’s people in the New Covenant era. It is used in two ways: 1. As a collective term for all Christians. In this study this is referred to as <i>‘The Church’</i> and <i>‘The Universal Church’</i> . 2. It is used of a localized, regular gathering of Christians, <i>‘a church’</i> . In this study this is used interchangeably with ‘congregation’ and ‘assembly’. It never refers to a building of any sort or any man-made subsection of The Church – i.e. a denominational group. (See also the first page of the study under <i>‘What is the Church?’</i> for details of one instance where ‘church’ is misleadingly translated).
Covenant	See ‘Testament’.
Inspiration	When used in Scripture of Scripture it means the incontrovertible, <i>‘God-breathed’</i> word. A man or woman may be ‘inspired’ in what he or she says, writes, sings or prophesies but it will not be a ‘for-all-time word’. The term ‘inspiration of Scripture’ means it is God’s revealed instruction and pattern for <u>all</u> Christians and <u>all</u> churches in <u>all</u> places at <u>all</u> times.
Minister	Translated from a variety of Greek words usually meaning ‘servant’ or similar. It is not used in a specific sense of an ‘office’ (see office). Local churches were not overseen by a ‘minister’. They were overseen by a plurality of elders.

<p>Ministry (see also 'priest')</p>	<p>The commonly used word for 'ministry' in the New Testament means 'service'. It is noted in this study that <i>'The Ministry'</i> is the work of <u>all</u> believers (see section on <i>'Authority in the Universal Church'</i> in reference to Ephesians 4:11&12). There are three references in the New Testament that perhaps best encapsulate the meaning of <i>'The Ministry'</i>: 2 Cor. 3:6 to 4:1 our ministry is the "New Testament" (God's current basis for dealing with human beings); 2 Cor. 5:18 we have "<i>the ministry of reconciliation</i>" (by God's grace he allows us to be involved in the process of sinners being reunited to Himself); 1 Cor. 16:15 we are in "<i>the ministry of the saints</i>" (all Christians are called to serve all other Christians in whatever way God enables them). The latter two references here are really the two streams of outworking the first. We are ministers (servants) of God and man. It is the same concept as priesthood. We are all in the priesthood; we are all 'in the ministry'.</p>
<p>New Testament (see also 'testament')</p>	<p>Commonly used to describe the twenty-seven books of the Bible from Matthew to Revelation. To be more precise, it really covers the portion of the Bible from Acts chapter 2 (the outpouring at Pentecost marked the commencement of the New Testament) to the end of Revelation. Even more relevantly it defines the whole age, which started at Pentecost and continues up until the present day. Acts chapter 2 also shows clearly that this period is also termed "<i>the last days</i>" (v.17) (another grossly misused phrase). In other words the New Testament age is the final phase of God's dealings with man before Jesus will return and intervene directly in the affairs of this world.</p>
<p>Office</p>	<p>This is an added word used by the A.V. translators. For example: "<i>if a man desire the office of a bishop</i>" (1Tim 3:1). These last five words are just one in the Greek. An alternative translation would be: "if a man desire <i>oversheership</i>" or "if a man has a desire <i>to be a bishop</i>" or "<i>to do the work of a bishop</i>". In the same passage (v.10) we read of deacons: "<i>let them use the office of a deacon</i>" again, these seven words are translating just one word in the Greek; it just means 'serve' or 'minister'. Where I have used the term 'office' in this study it simply means 'a recognized role'. 'Office' is way too officious.</p>
<p>Old Testament (see also 'testament')</p>	<p>Commonly used to describe the thirty-nine books of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi. More accurately used, it covers the period that started at Exodus 19/20 when the people agreed (covenanted) to do what ever God said and God gave them The Law, to the end of Acts chapter 1 (Acts 2 marking the commencement of the New Testament era). It must always be remembered that the Old Covenant was an interim arrangement until Christ came and completed the necessary work for God to be able to regenerate corrupt human hearts (Gal. 3:19). The Old Testament, as in the agreement between God and man, has been entirely superseded by the New (Heb 8:13).</p>
<p>Pastor</p>	<p>Used only once in the Bible as a noun, its meaning is 'shepherd'. It could be interpreted as being synonymous with bishop, overseer and elder, which is a local church role. Alternatively, it could be interpreted as a Universal Church function as is the case for the other roles mentioned in the same list where it occurs (Eph 4:11), (See section on <i>'the pastoral system'</i> for more on these two possible interpretations). It never in any way implies an individual who has overall responsibility for a local church or an individual who is in any way distinct among other elders. It should never be used in the personal <i>'my pastor'</i> except in reference to Jesus. Remember, "<i>The Lord is my Shepherd.</i>"</p>
<p>Pattern</p>	<p>Wherever I have used the term 'pattern' in this study, my only intended meaning and association with this word is: <i>'example we should follow'</i>.</p>
<p>Priest (see also 'ministry')</p>	<p>In the context of the Old Testament a priest was someone who functioned in a visibly distinct office. With one exception (Melchisedec), where 'priest' is used it refers to either a descendant of Aaron or a religious leader in a pagan order of worship. In both cases this office was accompanied with special garments, 'holy' places, religious ceremonies and required special 'instruments' of worship. In the context of the New Testament and where it is used of Christians it is reflective of an 'inward', spiritual role into which <u>all</u> believers are born (when we receive that "<i>one baptism</i>" into God). All Christians are priests under the New Covenant; there is no such concept as some who are and some who aren't. God, as an interim order of things, established the Old Testament priesthood. It was full of symbolic meanings relating to the work that Christ has now fulfilled. Any order of priesthood now other than the spiritual priesthood of all believers is an express denial of the full accomplishment of Christ's work.</p>
<p>Testament</p>	<p>Literally means a contract or agreement. It is used interchangeably in Scripture and in this study with 'Covenant'.</p>
<p>Worship</p>	<p>This word is used in translation of a wide variety of words in both the Old and the New Testament. Their literal meanings are along the lines of: Bow down, prostrate, serve, esteem, venerate etc. It is suggested in this study that the underlying meaning of <i>'worship'</i> is <i>'to sacrifice'</i> (see <i>'a note on worship'</i> p.9). Worship can take place and find expression in many things, but its fundamental meaning does not equate with singing or music. True worshippers of the living God do so by living everyday in self-denying sacrifice in favour of the will of God taking precedence in their lives. Worship is <u>not</u> the reason given in the Bible for churches to gather together. Edification ("<i>building one another up in our most holy faith</i>") is the plainly and frequently stated reason for the assembly meeting. Worship should indeed take place in our hearts as we sing, pray, preach, wait, listen etc. but the outward activities themselves do not constitute an 'act of worship'. The question "where do you worship?" has only one answer in Scripture – "<i>in spirit and in truth</i>" (John 4:23,24).</p>