

Leadership Kit

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Assembly Planting

In the courtyard of a hotel in Honolulu, I saw my first Banyan tree. As the branches of this tree grow out, they send down shoots that reach to the ground, take root, and form secondary trunks. I have always felt that this tree is a parable of ideal church growth. It pictures the way assemblies should multiply. As a local fellowship grows, it should send forth human "shoots" to take root in adjoining areas and form new assemblies.

This is the ideal, but unfortunately we don't live in an ideal world. While leaders generally pay lip service to church planting, they display a natural resistance to it whenever it becomes a live possibility. They parade their sixty theological reasons why, in their particular case, it is not a desirable option, or why the time is not yet ripe. They do not want to see the status quo disturbed when everything is going along so smoothly. They need all the help they can get. There is not sufficient qualified leadership for a new work. A hive-off would make it harder for the home church to meet its financial obligations. The children and young people in a new work would not have the same opportunities for fellowship with their

own age groups as they would in a larger work. The leaders agree that they will encourage a new work some day -- but not yet.

Other evangelical churches are not deterred by these considerations, and they experience steady growth. Certainly the cults refuse to be held back by this conventional wisdom, and they charge ahead like gangbusters.

If we are to escape the indictment, "faithfulness without fruitfulness" or "truth without growth," we must not listen to our hesitations, but must abandon our natural reluctance and determine before God to give ourselves to the ministry of assembly planting, whatever the cost may be.

How is a new assembly born? It should start with a heaven-sent vision placed on the heart of one or more believers. There should be a burden that will not go away, a persistent consciousness that God is leading. The Holy Spirit plants the idea and creates an answering desire in the hearts of His people.

The vision must be bathed in prayer. In this way we acknowledge our inability to make correct judgments and our absolute dependence on His wisdom. Christ, after all, is the Head of the assembly, and only the Head has the right to decide. As we pray, the vision comes more and more into focus. What was a general burden at first gradually becomes specific as to location, agenda, and leadership.

There must be strong, spiritual leadership. Without it, the work is liable to fall apart at an early stage. It is desirable to have what could be called a church planting team--at least two or three couples. Efforts by one man, working alone, have not had a good track record. The Lord Jesus worked with twelve disciples. Paul traveled with a team of men, planting assemblies. It seems to be a divine pattern.

If the new work is to be a hive-off from an existing assembly or assemblies, it is important to proceed with tact, love, and unity. Very often there is that natural hesitation and reluctance in existing assemblies to see valued members leave. Elders often fear what seems to be a threat to their numbers. It takes prayerful waiting on the Lord to see Him incline the hearts of the leaders to extend the right hand of fellowship to the new work.

The church planting team will want to agree on certain basic issues and to adopt certain ground rules. For example, they will draw up a statement of faith. In addition, they might consider the following ground rules which one team agreed on:

There must be absolute unity on the fundamentals of the Christian faith. No deviation from these basic truths would be tolerated.

On secondary matters, the assembly would submit to the consensus of the fellowship.

The church planting team would not necessarily constitute the permanent leadership. They would serve for at least one year. At the end of that time, the assembly would meet to ascertain which men the Lord had raised up to be elders. There would then be a public recognition of this leadership and the church planting team would be dissolved.

When the assembly would grow in numbers to between 100 and 150, positive steps would then be taken toward the formation of another work.

No efforts would be made to grow by transfers from other assemblies or churches. Rather the goal would be to reach unsaved people, see them converted, baptized, disciplined and brought into the fellowship.

A decision must be made with regard to location. New residential neighborhoods are ideal, but it is preferable not to locate in the front yard of an already-established evangelical church. At first, the assembly can meet in a home. Then, when it outgrows the home, it can move to rented facilities or it can purchase or build a modest building. Sometimes zoning laws and parking regulations preclude home meetings. The leadership must weigh all the pros and cons.

The nature and order of meetings are generally fairly easy to decide. The team will take into account the centrality of worship, the importance of collective prayer, and the spiritual diet needed for the flock.

Just as there is joy when a baby is born, so there is a deep-seated ecstasy in connection with the planting of a new assembly. Believers experience a new warmth of fellowship, an enthusiasm in striving together to see the assembly grow, and a satisfaction in exercising gifts that are stifled in a larger church.

Just as human families rejoice when sons and daughters marry and start families of their own, so assemblies should rejoice when they are privileged to "parent" new works and to see them functioning as autonomous churches.

Assembly planting is the will of God. Blessed are those who work with Him in accomplishing His will!

Qualifications of Elders

An elder must be:

Blameless (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6, 7). He must be above reproach, both at home and away from home. He must not be open to justifiable accusations. It obviously does not mean that he must be sinless, but it may include the thought that when he does offend, he makes things right quickly by apology, confession and restitution.

Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). Does this mean that a man must be married? No. The emphasis is on one wife, not a wife. Yet it cannot be denied that the experiences of married life equip a man to deal with the family problems of others better than if he were single.

Does it mean he must not remarry should his first wife die? Remarriage in such a case is not frowned on in the New Testament (Rom. 7:2, 3; 1 Cor. 7:39-, 1 Tim. 6:14).

Does it mean that a man must not be divorced under any circumstances? The exception clause in Matthew 19:9 allows for divorce when one partner has been guilty of immorality.

Does it mean that a man must not be remarried after divorce? If a man is divorced on Scriptural grounds, he is free to

remarry. However, even if the man is really an innocent party, he must face the fact that there may be questions from time to time as to this irregularity in his married life. This is something he may have to live with.

Does it mean that he must not be a bigamist, a polygamist, or have concubines or lesser wives? Certainly these conditions would bar him from being an elder in a local assembly.

We can be sure that the general thrust of this requirement is that the man must be a faithful husband and have an exemplary married life.

Vigilant (KJV) better rendered "temperate" (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). He must be self-controlled, not only in regard to his appetite but in every area of life. He must be restrained, not indulgent; moderate, not extreme; alert, not sleeping.

Sober or sober-minded (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). He must be serious about the issues of life and of eternity, given more to edifying others than to light, frothy conversation. He must not be perpetually cracking jokes, but must be exhorting, teaching, guiding, comforting, warning and encouraging. He must be a sensible, mature man, not a spiritual featherweight. He must be prudent and sound in judgment, not characterized by levity and worldly-wisdom.

of good behavior (KJV) or orderly (I Tim. 3:2). The word "orderly" first requires that he be disciplined in his personal life, in the home, in business and in assembly life. It means that he is not careless or slipshod. He keeps appointments on time and does his work on schedule. He is neat and methodical, working systematically, not helter-skelter. It may also include the idea that he is dignified and respectable.

Given to hospitality (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). This means that an elder keeps "open house" for all, both saved and unsaved, and is always ready to provide spiritual and material help. In order for him to be hospitable, his wife must share his goals and be willing to spend herself in this important ministry.

Apt to teach (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:24-26). An elder must have a working knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, able to teach, to exhort, and to expose and rebuke false doctrine. He does not have to have the gift of teaching, but must be able to help people from the Word with their problems. As someone has said, "He must be able to communicate the Word to others in a non-threatening and objective manner." To be able to teach others, he must be teachable himself.

Not given to wine (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). He is not given to excess in this area but able to control his appetite. But there, is also the thought that he is not a brawler (RV) and not quarrelsome over wine (RV, marg.). This qualification may seem superfluous in a country where many if not most Christians practice total abstinence, but we must remember that the Bible was written for all countries and all cultures.

No striker (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). This means exactly what it says -- that an elder does not hit other people. He is not pugnacious or combative. This requirement may forbid emotional as well as physical violence, but it does not forbid discipline of a man's children.

Not greedy of filthy lucre, that is, no lover of money (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:2). An elder realizes that he is here for bigger business than to make money. For him the spiritual has a higher priority than the material. Money is not an end but

a means to an end. He adopts a modest standard of living, so that everything above his needs and those of his family can be used for the Lord. He doesn't serve the Lord for pay, feeling it is better for the ministry to cost him than for it to make him rich.

Patient. or better, gentle (1 Tim. 3:3). An elder is meek and longsuffering. He does not cut down people with words, or treat them harshly. Rather he treats the flock as a good shepherd handles lambs.

Not a brawler, that is, not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3). If a man is contentious, argumentative, or quarrelsome, he is disqualified as an elder. A godly overseer doesn't go around with a chip on his shoulder. He is not always carrying on a debate with some fancied opponent. He is not a source of disunity among God's people.

One who rules well his own children (1 Tim. 3:4, 5; Tit. 1:6). This does not mean that an elder must have children, but, once again, he will be better able to handle family problems that arise in the assembly if he has raised children himself.

The elder's children must be believers and must be subject to his leadership in the home. This certainly applies to little children living at home, but it may also apply to grown children as well. The word used here for children is used for grown children in 1 Timothy 5:4 and Titus 1:6. It is disquieting how closely the Bible links parental training with the behavior of children (Prov. 22:6). If a man cannot rule his own family well, it is unlikely that he will be a suitable elder, since the same principles apply in each case (1 Tim. 3:5).

Not a novice (1 Tim. 3:6). The peril of pushing new converts into places of spiritual leadership is evident from the tragic results that have followed. Pride and conceit make them easy prey, for the Devil's trap. Just as a baby should crawl before he walks or talks, so should a believer have a normal spiritual growth. A man who has never had a spiritual childhood should never be an elder. There must be that training and seasoning that come from years of Bible study and experience in the things of God.

A good testimony from outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7). The elder must have a good reputation among unbelievers. In business and social contacts, his life must match his profession. He is disqualified if the unsaved have to say of him, "What you are speaks so loud I can't hear what you say." Or if the Indian has to say, "Heap high talk -- heap low walk."

Not self-willed (Tit. 1:7). Since an elder is one among equals, he must be able to work cooperatively with others. If he is stubborn and inflexible on nonessentials, if he always has to have his own way, he should eliminate himself from consideration as an elder. The elder must not be a dictator or a tyrant, lording it over God's heritage. A man who has always been boss in his own business may find it especially difficult to conquer self-will. Also those who have a pathological distaste for unanimous decisions must change if they are to be overseers.

Not soon angry (Tit. 1:7). An elder must not be quick-tempered, irritable or volatile. To put it in vernacular, he must not fly off the handle easily or have a short fuse.

A lover of good (Tit. 1:8). This means that he must be a lover of good men, and of good in general. And of course, to love

good is to do good.

Just (Tit. 1:8). A just man is one who can always be depended on to do what is right. He is honest, fair and impartial. With him there are no shady dealings, no under-the-counter transactions. People can trust him implicitly.

Holy (Tit. 1:8). Here the elder must be separated to God from sin and the world. His life must be one of moral purity and spiritual dedication to God. He must live in right relationship to the Lord.

Holding fast the faithful Word (Tit. 1:9). This means that he is unalterably committed to the inspiration and authority of the Sacred Scriptures, and that he defends the Word against false teachings.

NOTE: In this list of qualifications, nothing has been said about:

Academic degrees

Success In business

Scintillating personality

Financial wealth

Duties of an Elder

1. It is taken for granted that an elder must be in faithful attendance at the meetings of the assembly and thus aware of situations among the saints that might need his attention. He must be sensitive to needs and attempt to minister to these needs.
2. Together with the other elders, he should set goals and priorities for the assembly.
3. He should teach the Word of Truth.
4. He should carry on a counseling ministry, both with saved and unsaved. This should include pre-marital counseling when he is asked to perform a wedding ceremony.
5. He should be a tireless visitor, contacting the saints on a systematic basis, and also taking the gospel to the unconverted.
6. He should have a disciplined prayer life, interceding regularly for every family in the local fellowship.
7. Together with his wife, he should have an open house, showing hospitality as an integral part of his ministry.
8. He should be constantly seeking to recognize the gifts in the assembly and to provide outlets for the development of

these gifts.

9. He must exercise watchfulness concerning those who might be growing cold or who might be in danger of falling into sin. He must also be watchful concerning the doctrine, making sure that the saints get a good, balanced diet, free from error. Repetition of fundamental truths from time to time is desirable. Whenever necessary he must correct, reprove, rebuke, exhort, and exercise other forms of discipline.

10. He should be constantly training younger men for leadership.

11. He should serve as a conciliator when differences arise among the saints.

12. He should lead by the example of a godly life, and be available and approachable at any time of the day or night.

Recognition of Elders

Both the Bible and experience show the need for strong, spiritual leadership in any assembly. They also require that this leadership must be recognized, because if it is not recognized, how can it be obeyed?

Every ordered society is built on two pillars: authority and subjection to that authority. It is impossible to conceive of a disciplined, harmonious community that does not have these two elements. They must be found in the home, business, government, the military, and also in the church. Where they do not exist, there is anarchy, and no society can continue long under anarchy.

Christ Is the Head of the Church, and He has ordained that elders should serve as His under-shepherds. They do not run the Church. He does! But they should be men of such spiritual excellence that they can discern His will for the assembly at any particular time.

There is no question that in the early church, the elders were a clearly discernible body. When Paul was in Miletus, he summoned the elders of the assembly in Ephesus to come to him (Acts 20:17). There was no indecisiveness, no mock-humility by men protesting that they were not spiritual enough. The elders came (v. 18).

It is true that in those days the apostles appointed elders. Some have reasoned from this that since we do not have apostles today, we cannot have elders. That is a misunderstanding. The reason the apostles ordained elders is that the New Testament was not in existence. The saints did not know the qualifications of elders. But the apostles knew and marked out those who met the qualifications. Today we have those qualifications clearly spelled out in the New Testament, and we can recognize those men who do the work and who fulfill the spiritual requirements.

Is it necessary to have a formal recognition of elders in the assembly? It may not be necessary for older, more mature saints, but it is necessary for younger ones and even for unsaved folks who may be attending.

Doubtless there are many methods by which elders can be recognized. In suggesting the following one, we are not claiming that it is the best -- only that it has been used with good results.

The first step is to select a mature, spiritual man to handle the process. He may be from within the assembly or from some other assembly. It is important that he himself is not seeking a place of leadership in the church. In other words, he is detached and impartial.

He is asked to minister to the entire assembly on the qualifications and work of elders. If this ministry is spread over a number of weeks, one session each week, it gives the believers plenty of time to prayerfully consider the matter and saves them from hasty judgments.

In the first session, he explains the purpose and process. He is going to give in-depth teaching on the qualifications and work of elders. As he does so, the saints should be prayerfully deliberating within themselves as to whom the Lord has raised up to be elders in the assembly. It is not going to be an election, a popularity contest, or a question of personal preferences. They should individually wait on God for a revelation of His mind in the matter.

After the teaching sessions have concluded, they are to communicate to the teacher their conclusions. They may do this by letter, by phone, or by personal conversation. They are guaranteed that their decisions will be held in strictest confidence. If they wish to write anonymously, they may do so.

In teaching the qualifications of elders, it is important to emphasize that they are not unattainable. When rightly understood, they describe a man of sterling Christian character.

In tracing the work of an elder, it should be pointed out that a man should not be recognized unless he is already doing the work.

When the meetings are over and the Christians have submitted their considered judgment, the teacher collates the results. Usually a definite pattern will emerge. Some man or men will be clearly recognized as elders. In other cases, the result will be less conclusive.

The teacher then meets privately with those who have been definitely recognized by the assembly. He may ask them if they wish to be officially recognized. If so, a preliminary announcement can be made to the assembly, announcing the names and allowing a week for any objections. Barring any major misgivings, the names of the elders can be announced.

What about future recognition of elders? The same process can be repeated, or the existing elders may decide when a person meets all the Scriptural requirements. But this procedure is only valid if the decision is one that the assembly would reach according to the foregoing process.

Church Growth

Any assembly that desires to grow must face this fact: between 80% and 90% of new converts are originally contacted by individual believers within the context of their daily lives, whether at work, at school, or in the neighborhood. This does not belittle other methods of evangelism, but it shows that personal, lifestyle evangelism towers above all others.

We should not be surprised. This was how the faith spread in the early days of the church. The Christians took the risen Savior's words seriously, "...you shall be witnesses to me" (Acts 1:8b). They "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The world will never be evangelized in any other way.

We must abandon the common misconception that the believer's sole responsibility is to get the unsaved to attend the meetings so that the preacher can present the gospel and then lead them to Christ. Every believer should be doing the work of an evangelist. He should be able to present the way of salvation to his contacts. Then when he senses that the Holy Spirit has thoroughly convicted them of sin, he should be able to lead them to Christ as their only hope for heaven.

This does not mean that our evangelism should be unrelated to the local assembly. While our main goal is to see people come to Christ, we also want to see them added to the fellowship. We bring the unsaved to the meetings to confirm the testimony we have already given to them. Or, if we have already pointed them to Christ, we bring them in order to see them disciplined in accordance with the Great Commission.

An evangelistic assembly is a praying assembly. The place to start is in prayer. This is where the work is done. The saints must be desperate before God in fervent intercession for lost relatives, friends, and neighbors. No amount of programs and gimmicks will ever take the place of prayer. We are in a spiritual battle, and it must be fought with spiritual weapons.

An evangelistic assembly is a holy assembly. Effective witness cannot be divorced from sanctified lives. The fruit that a tree bears is a reflection of the condition of the tree itself. A healthy tree brings forth good fruit. Those who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean.

An evangelistic assembly is a loving assembly. It has a warm, accepting atmosphere. It reaches out to strangers, to those who hurt, to those who have needs. It is people-oriented. It manifests its love by being hospitable. It is outgoing, not ingrown. It cares.

An evangelistic assembly is a united assembly. The saints are united in an enthusiasm to see souls saved. They are united in a common, prayerful expectancy. And they are united in a shared joy when people are converted.

We mentioned that the most effective way of making new contacts is through the daily witness of the believers. But there are other methods that should be mentioned. For instance, there is door-to-door visitation. This certainly makes the presence of the assembly known in any community. There are home Bible studies, which have been greatly used in laying a doctrinal foundation for those who later trust the Lord. There is campus evangelism, a good way to reach young people for the Lord and for the assembly. There is the ministry of literature; its possibilities are tremendous. There are special evangelistic crusades with an anointed gospel preacher. These have been wonderfully used in some places, and sadly ineffective in others. An assembly can advertise its meetings in the local paper. God has used this method to lead isolated

individuals to the meetings. Then, of course, there are special programs, films, and musical events.

To break down the natural resistance toward attending an assembly for the first time, some fellowships have used less formal methods successfully: picnics, baseball or volleyball games, and hospitality in homes. By attending these, people get to know the local Christians and can more easily be induced to attend the meetings.

In order for believers to be enthusiastic about bringing their contacts to the meetings of the assembly, they must be assured that the ministry will be of a high spiritual quality. This fact should cause the elders to be much before the Lord concerning those whom they schedule to minister the Word. Christians will not bring their friends to hear a stumbling, rambling sermon. They want to be sure that there will be a bona fide presentation of the gospel and that there will be solid teaching for those who are already believers.

Does this mean that the speakers must be seminary-trained men or those with advanced educational credentials? Not at all! Mere scholarship without deep spirituality can be a boring, deadening thing. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. A scholarly message might reach the head without ever getting down to the heart. What is needed is ministry empowered by the Holy Spirit, ministry with unction, ministry that produces conviction, contrition, conversion, and consecration. God very often uses homespun and untrained men for this work, so that the glory will be His, not man's.

There are few things as good for an assembly as to see souls saved on a regular basis. This produces ecstasy like that of a maternity ward. And it can be the experience of any assembly that is willing to devote itself to New Testament evangelism. But we must have a holy horror of going year after year without seeing any conversions. And we must be willing to use new methods where the old ones are proving singularly ineffective. We get what we go after in life. Let us go after souls.

One-on-One Discipleship

In the previous chapter, we talked about church growth through Spirit-led evangelism. Now the question is, "What are we going to do with the new converts? What is the best way to assure their growth to spiritual maturity?"

A common approach is to encourage the new believer to faithfully attend all the meetings of the assembly and receive his instruction in this way. But this method has drawbacks. It is extremely slow; it usually has to extend over many years. It is incomplete; there is no guarantee that all important subjects will be covered. It does not teach the convert how to engage in practical Christian work; it is all academic. Jesus not only taught doctrine; He took the disciples out and showed them how to do the work.

As soon as someone is saved, a spiritually mature believer should undertake the responsibility of discipline him. If the convert is a woman or girl, then an older sister should become the teacher (Tit. 2:3-5).

Rather than following the same stereotyped program for each person, the one doing the discipline should look to the Holy Spirit for individual guidance. Then he must ask himself. "What are the subjects that we should cover so that this convert

will be a well-grounded and well-rounded believer?" The following might be a representative list: assurance of salvation; eternal security; baptism; worship and the Lord's Supper; daily quiet time; personal holiness; Bible study; prayer; guidance; Scripture memory; stewardship of time, talents, and money; personal evangelism. And all this should be supplemented by the consecutive, systematic study of the Scriptures themselves.

It is important to have a regular weekly appointment with the convert, lasting no less than an hour. Here the teacher not only covers the truth of believer's baptism but encourages the disciple to take this step of obedience. Here the teacher explains about the Breaking of Bread service and urges compliance with the Savior's request, "This do in remembrance of me." He teaches the baby Christian how to pray by praying with him. He shows him how to study the Bible, using available helps (concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, etc.). He guides him in the selection of books for his library. He answers questions that may arise. He gives help on personal problems. He commends every evidence of progress, and counsels concerning areas of Christian character that need attention.

When the teacher goes out witnessing, he takes the disciple with him. When he visits the sick, he takes the disciple with him. He opens his home, giving practical training in Christian marriage, the Christian home, and proper child training. As much as possible, he shares his life with the one he is seeking to train.

On-fire assemblies today know that it is important to give each new believer individual attention in addition to the training he receives in the meetings. It is costly, but it is effective. It is the method which the Lord used, and therefore it must be the best.

Leadership Training

(The author of this article is concerned with personal discipline that is geared to raising up leaders in the local assembly. Elders should always make provision for men to share their ministry and eventually to be their successors.)

As important as gospel preaching is in the mission of the church, if we incline our vision no higher than seeing souls saved, of having as our ultimate goal the conversion of unbelievers to become faithful meeting-attenders, then we are guilty of short-sightedness and will eventually be faced with the prospect of a spiritually weak and impotent assembly.

We must set our sights on nothing less than the transformation of immature believers into leaders of the church if we are to share the vision of the One who declared, "I will build my church." In fact, the key factor that insures the continuance of His living edifice is the raising up of spiritual leaders from generation to generation, a strategy that the Master Himself was busily engaged in when He uttered the preceding statement.

But if we are to share the vision of the Lord Jesus for church leadership, then we must also adopt His method if we hope to succeed. And His method was personal discipleship - the choice of certain men to be with Him. If the Savior Himself trained His men through three years of constant, personal attention, how can we expect to see effective leaders raised up by relying solely on Bible classes and pulpit ministry?

An illustration of the Lord's method is seen in His work with Peter. Study the occurrences of statements and questions, which He directed to Peter, and you will begin to catch glimpses into the personal relationship between Peter and his Lord. And you will see the Savior at work in the life of His disciple - confronting, challenging, encouraging, transforming a rough, untaught fisherman into a faithful shepherd of the flock of God. We can assume that the Savior's method was no different with the eleven other disciples. When the training was complete, He had raised up men who, when filled with the Holy Spirit, actually turned the world upside down.

Of course, we can think of objections to following this strategy in our own lives. It seems to us that greater numbers in the training relationship would produce greater dividends in the end. So we prefer to teach large classes and preach to hundreds, hoping to affect more lives at one time. But the result too often is hundreds of shallow Christians. You cannot disciple crowds. Yet when considering the option of spending our time with one or two key men on a regular basis, we think within ourselves. "Why this waste?" and prefer to scatter our efforts across the masses. But this was not the Lord's approach to leaving a legacy of strong leaders.

Another difficulty to overcome in adopting our Lord's approach is the cost of transparency. We run the risk of being known by our disciple in a way that would never be true in a class or from a pulpit. The Lord did not shrink from that intimacy but allowed Himself to be seen, heard, and handled by twelve men every day for three years. When the time had ended, all except one had acquired the same selfless love for others that they had seen and experienced in Him.

This is not to imply that specially gifted and charismatic men cannot have a strong influence on the lives of others solely through ministry to the multitudes. But such men represent a small percentage of the body of Christ, and to expect this method to be the chief source of church leadership is both unrealistic and unscriptural. The result of this method will be a church that flourishes during the active ministry of one man and then dies away with his passing -- for want of faithful men to carry on in his place. Contrast this situation with the Lord's parting words to Peter (John 21:15) and those of Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 2:2).

Man-to-man discipleship does not require specially gifted or charismatic leaders to be effective. Its success depends on a Spirit-filled man who loves God, His Word and His people, and is willing to open his life to another. Given this as the strategy, the tactics are simple.

Meet together often for Bible study and prayer.

Teach by example. Let the disciple see your godly life and your burden for people up close. Jesus did.

Teach through practical experience. Take your disciple with you when visiting the saints and witnessing to the unsaved, and afterwards explain what you did and why you did it. Jesus did.

Work on character. Think of the Lord constantly reminding Peter of his impulsiveness and self-confidence. What is it about your disciple that prevents the adjectives "holy and blameless" from being applied practically?

Exhort and encourage him in the Word, and pray for him. Jesus did.

If anyone had a vision for the growth of the church, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for it. If we are to share that vision with Him in its fullest sense, that is, beyond seeing souls saved to the raising up of leaders of the flock who will be able to teach others also, then we must adopt His methods as our own. If the Son of God Himself found it necessary to concentrate on a few faithful men, how much more should we.

Rick Belles

Church Growth through Hospitality

Every believer should be interested in church growth, whether the church at large or his own local assembly. The Great Commission calls for the expansion of the body of Christ on earth.

There are many different methods that can be used in achieving this goal. No one method is the best. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and works according to His own good pleasure. Sometimes He is pleased to use a combination of approaches rather than any one.

Some methods are more difficult than others. Door-to-door canvassing, for instance, can be very difficult. This is partly due to the fact that the cults have antagonized the public and made it hard for evangelicals. Also, in some urban areas people are afraid to open their doors for strangers.

And some methods are less effective than others. Door-to-door work again! Believers have faithfully covered the area around their chapel several times with little or nothing to show for it.

Which brings me to my main point! Hospitality is a method that is highly successful, yet often overlooked. We work hard to get people inside the doors, yet treat them with cool neglect instead of capitalizing on our gains.

Let me run two scenarios past you!

Tom and Fran moved into the neighborhood recently. Sunday morning comes and they decide to look for a good church. So 10:45 a.m. finds them walking into the chapel, a bit intimidated. People are busy visiting in clutches. One man intercepts them, shakes hands and comments on the fine weather. They dodge between knots of people to find their way to seats -- toward the rear of the chapel. The service proceeds on schedule -- good singing, good message. Twelve o'clock. The closing prayer. The people rise to leave. Here and there some saints lean toward each other and whisper, "Who are those strangers?" -- almost as if they were intruders. Others visit with their friends animatedly, catching up on the news of the week. Tom and Fran are almost at the door when an elder greets them, "Glad to have you with us today. Hope you'll come back." They leave and go to the local McDonald's for a hamburger.

Scenario #2. Euphoric over the birth of their first child, Ron and Ruth decide they should start going to church. They don't

want their son to grow up as a heathen. They approach the door of the chapel apprehensively. An usher greets them warmly, explains about the nursery, and tells them that they will be invited out for dinner. They don't know it but there is a standing rule in the assembly that all strangers will be invited out. Sure enough before the service even starts a pleasant couple introduces themselves and invites the newcomers home for a meal. Ron and Ruth are relaxed and feel a warmth about this church. This has never happened to them before.

At dinner the host gives thanks for the food. The conversation is low-key -- just a time to get acquainted. It turns out that both Ron and Ruth are from Christian backgrounds, but neither is a believer. The visit is profitable as an ice-breaker. The newcomers feel that they have found some caring people.

Question! Which couple is more likely to return?

Answer. Tom and Fran never came back. Ron and Ruth are saved now and in happy fellowship. The results speak for themselves.

Why are we so hesitant to entertain strangers when it has proved so rewarding in the past? Fear is probably one of the main reasons -- fear of the unknown, fear of a new situation, fear of new people, fear of not knowing what to do or how to do it. And of course there is the fear of not knowing what to talk about, of not being "spiritual" enough, of not being able to witness effectively.

A second reason is that we have other plans for Sunday afternoon, and taking strangers home would interfere with those arrangements.

Then we think of the added work involved, getting the house immaculate, preparing a meal, then cleaning up afterward. And trying to entertain people at the same time.

Hospitality can be expensive, depending on the menu, and this may discourage those who have to operate on a limited budget.

A final reason for not showing hospitality. A chosen few in the assembly get saddled with the responsibility all the time. They are the only ones who do it and it gets old hat after a while.

In answer to the first objection, there is no real need to fear. We should just determine to be ourselves, to let people see us as we are. It is not necessary to force the gospel on them. The mere giving of thanks, a testimony shared, or verses read after the meal are enough.

It is true that if we are to be hospitable, it may interfere with our Sunday plans. We have to determine in advance that this is going to be one of our priority ministries.

Hospitality does involve work and inconvenience, but we should not offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing. And we

should remember that what is done in His Name is reckoned as being done for Himself. Imagine having Jesus home for Sunday dinner!

Hospitality need not be expensive. We don't have to cook up a fancy meal. A simple fare in pleasant company is all that matters.

But the ministry of hospitality should not be left to one or two in the assembly. If enough families take up the ministry, many strangers can be accommodated without burdening anyone.

Here are some practical pointers as to how some assemblies have grown through hospitality.

In one, the elders and their wives consistently Invite visitors to their home. If there aren't enough visitors, then they Invite some of the saints to whom they can minister in one way or another. Needless to say, the example of the elders speaks to the other believers.

Another assembly has an Angels' Committee. Each Sunday two couples are assigned to bring a casserole, salad, rolls and dessert. Ushers direct visitors to them for a meal in the chapel dining area after the morning service. The saints thus entertain angels unawares, giving rise to the name of their committee. Once again, if there aren't enough visitors, the hosts are free to invite guests from the chapel.

Many assemblies have a hostess who assigns visitors to particular Sundays. The emphasis is on reaching out to those who are in the service for the first time.

Most fellowships are careful to see that the visiting speaker is invited to someone's home for a meal. What they don't realize is that often the preacher would prefer to relinquish this privilege if he could know that strangers were being taken care of.

If a family holds back for fear of not being able to carry on a profitable conversation, let them consider inviting the speaker along with strangers to handle this part of the ministry.

If Christians are afraid to invite strangers, they should know that very often visitors are equally afraid of entering a new situation. And visitors frequently cannot accept because they already have other plans. But the fact that they have been invited gives them a sense of warmth and acceptance.

Scores of people in assemblies today will testify that they were drawn, not by New Testament church order, or by the preaching, or by the teaching, but by the kind hospitality that was shown to them on their first visit.

Is it possible that in our frenetic attempts to promote church growth, we are overlooking one of the most obvious and successful methods?

Fundamentals and Secondary Issues

There are certain doctrines of the Christian faith which are absolutely fundamental. They are of first importance. As far as they are concerned, there can be no difference of opinion. Believers must be united on these great truths.

What Are the Fundamentals?

When we speak of the fundamentals, we are referring to the following:

The Inspiration of the Scriptures. The Bible is the Word of God.

The trinity. There Is one God, existing eternally In three Persons.

The deity of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is God.

The Incarnation. Jesus is also perfect Man.

His substitutionary death on Calvary, His burial, resurrection, and ascension to heaven.

The gospel. Salvation by grace, through faith. and apart from works.

The second advent. Christ is coming again. Though not all agree on the details of His return, the fact itself is a basic tenet of the faith.

The eternal punishment of the lost.

Now these doctrines are not negotiable—We are to earnestly contend for them. They are clearly taught in the Scriptures. They have been held by the evangelical, orthodox church down through the centuries. Conflicting views have been labeled heresies. Believers have been willing to die for these precious truths. We cannot have fellowship with those who deny the fundamentals.

Important Even though Not Fundamental

Richard Baxter's well-known formula is an oversimplification. He said:

In fundamentals, unity.

In secondary matters, liberty.

In all things, charity (or love).

This might create the impression that anything that is not fundamental is nonessential or unimportant. However, there is another classification that fits between these two -- subjects that are not fundamental but are nonetheless important. Jesus implied such a distinction when He said to the Pharisees, "...ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith (Matt. 23:23). In other words, some parts of the law are "weightier" than others. But Jesus also reminded them that even the less weighty matters of the law require obedience: "...these ought ye to have done and not to leave the other undone."

So, In the New Testament, there are matters which are not fundamental but which require obedience. These are matters on which the Bible speaks. Some of them are described as commandments of the Lord (I Cor. 14.37). We must not call them nonessentials or treat them as such.

These subjects include baptism; divorce and remarriage; the outline of prophecy; women's head covering; women's public ministry in the church; the gifts of the Spirit; and the topics covered by the five points of Calvinism.

The problem is that Christians hold differing views on these matters. While there is only one right interpretation, believers do not agree as to what that interpretation is. Great and godly men do not see eye to eye. Let us look at some of these issues on which the Bible gives instruction and which are important. even though they have never been regarded as fundamentals of the faith.

Baptism

For those who practice believer's baptism by immersion, it is easy to forget that many Christians hold very different views on the meaning and mode of baptism. Paul said, "There is...one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-5) but the many differences in Christendom today seem to deny it. The subject is important and every assembly should adopt a position that is consistent with all that the Bible teaches.

Divorce and Remarriage

Some say, "No divorce -- PERIOD!" Some say, "Divorce, but no remarriage." Others say, "Divorce for unfaithfulness but no remarriage." Still others say, "Divorce for unfaithfulness with freedom for the innocent party to remarry." Some say, "Divorce for desertion." There is no end to the different views. And it is doubtful that there will ever be unanimity.

Sooner or later, every local assembly must adopt a position on the subject in the fear of God, and adhere to that position. Individuals may hold other interpretations, but they must not press their views publicly or privately so as to cause division.

It should be added that even after an assembly adopts a position, the elders will still have to consider each case individually. Such complex situations arise today in the marriage relationship that no stated policy will cover every case.

The Outline of Prophecy

Some believers are premillennial, others postmillennial, and still other amillennial. Even among premillennialists, there are three major views: the pretribulation rapture, mid-tribulation rapture, and post-tribulation rapture. There are problems connected with every position. A person can hold any of these views and still be a good Christian.

It is proper that everyone knows what he believes and rejoices in it. But it is also proper that we remember there are godly, sincere believers who hold other views. These honest differences should not prevent us from breaking bread together. On the other hand, those who hold alternate views should respect the prophetic stance of an assembly, and not

push their views, thereby causing dissension. When someone insists that everyone must agree with his minority view, there is bound to be trouble.

Women's Head Covering

On the one side are those who hold that Paul's instructions were just for the culture in which he lived. Others insist that they are the commandments of the Lord, that Paul bases them on the order and purpose of creation, and that they are "because of the angels," therefore, for all time. Questions arise whether the head covering is just for meetings of the church (and, if so, what is a meeting of the church?), what constitutes a proper covering, etc.?

If the elders of an assembly do not adopt a policy on the subject, there is bound to be confusion. They owe it to the saints to state clearly what they believe the Scriptures teach.

Women's Ministry

When may a woman sing or speak in a meeting of the church? The answers given today are too numerous to list. With a sincere desire to obey the Scriptures as closely as possible, elders should adopt a clear, united position. These prayerful conclusions become the policy of the assembly.

The Sign Gifts

Another issue that holds the potential for trouble is the charismatic question. Tongues, healing, and prophecy seem to be the gifts around which most controversy has swirled. The differing viewpoints, even among charismatics themselves, are legion.

We can and must love Christians who disagree with us, but we must not allow the issue to cause division. Therefore, an assembly must decide what the Bible really teaches on this score. The elders have both a right and a responsibility to deal firmly with any who insist on teaching views that conflict and threaten the peace of the assembly.

Five-Point Calvinism

A five-point Calvinist believes in man's total depravity; God's unconditional election; limited atonement (i.e., only for the elect); irresistible grace; and the perseverance of the saints.' There are those who disagree. On the third point, for example, they insist that Christ's atonement was for all in its sufficiency and availability. Others insist that extreme Calvinism rules out man's free will.

Spiritually minded, soul-winning Christians are found on both sides of the issue. The fireworks begin when someone insists on pushing his own view where it is not welcome, or when he harps on one subject as if it were the only doctrine in the Bible. When silenced, he often leaves the assembly and influences others to leave with him.

The path of wisdom is to enjoy privately one's convictions on the subject but not to force them as if they represented the whole truth.

On all these subjects which are important though not fundamental, an assembly, under its leaders, should adopt a clearly stated position. This should be done after careful study and research, after much prayer and with a sincere desire to adhere as closely as possible to the Scriptures. If an assembly adopts a position that is not Scriptural, it is conceivable that some believers will want to withdraw. If so, they should do so graciously, and without seeking to draw others away with them.

Non-essential Issues

In addition to the first class of subjects (fundamentals) and the second class (important because taught in Scripture) there is a third class that can be clearly labeled as nonessential. When it comes to these matters, there will always be differing viewpoints, and there must be liberty to disagree without causing strife or division. Here the second line of Baxter's formula applies:

In secondary matters, liberty.

Among the non-essential issues are some on which the New Testament does not legislate specifically but which some people feel embody important principles: wine vs. grape juice at the Lord's Supper; one cup vs. individual cups; and the use of musical instruments.

There are other matters that are largely a matter of usage or tradition, such as the use of "Thou" and "Thee" in addressing God.

At least one question must be decided on its own merits, that is, the whole dispute as to the "best" Bible version.

Finally, there are matters of moral indifference. These include foods, drinks, and observance of days. They are nonessentials.

Now let us look at these various non-essential subjects and see how an assembly can handle them without conflict and division.

Wine vs. Grape Juice at the Lord's Supper

Let's face it! There are valid arguments on both sides. There is no question that when the Lord instituted the Supper, He used fermented wine and unleavened bread (grape juice did not come in until Pasteur developed pasteurization). But wine stumbles people who have a problem with alcohol, and we should never do anything that stumbles others (I Cor. 8:13). Also, there are many places in the world where wine is not available. After all, it is not the bread and wine that are important. We must get beyond them to the Lord Himself.

One Cup vs. Individual Cups

Again, there are two sides to the matter. On the one hand, one cup symbolizes the unity of the body of Christ. But as an assembly grows, it is not uncommon to use two, three, or even four cups. If four are valid, why not forty? The argument for individual cups rests largely on the danger of spreading disease through the common cup since wine does not have sufficient alcoholic content to kill germs. In any event, this is not a matter of fundamental importance. Rather it provides an opportunity to show love and consideration to those who disagree with us.

Use of Musical Instruments

Here again there must be liberty for an assembly to adopt its own policy. No major creed has ever considered instrumental accompaniment as a fundamental of the faith. We could paraphrase Paul's words without doing violence to them: "For in Christ Jesus neither does an organ avail anything nor the absence of an organ, but a new creation" (see Gal. 6:15).

Times of Meetings

Clearly the Lord has left the decision to the local assembly or its leaders. Sometimes changes must be made, depending on local circumstances. The best time for reaching the unsaved in one locality may not be the best time in another. Traditional times are not sacred. We must be ready to make changes, when they are indicated.

Thou vs. You

Many older Christians prefer to address God as "Thou" and "Thee" out of a sense of reverence. Younger believers prefer to use "You" out of a sense of intimacy but without any lack of reverence. It is not a Biblical problem. In the original language of the New Testament, there is no distinction between a formal "you" and a familiar one. But when the King James Version was published, people addressed one another as "thou" (singular) and "ye" (plural). Thus, Jesus is quoted in the King James Version as saying to Judas, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" -- certainly not the language of reverence.

What it boils down to is this: any assembly should be big enough to allow for both usages without creating a threatening atmosphere or driving people away.

Bible Versions

Considerable heat has been generated over this issue as a result of the proliferation of versions in recent years. Some believers sincerely believe that the truth of God is at stake. Others point out that the differences among the reputable versions are minor and do not affect any of the doctrines of the faith. As much as we might love any English version, we cannot insist that it is the only right one, because then none of the foreign language versions would be right. Individual Christians should be allowed to have their favorite version. When speaking publicly, a person should announce

the name of the one from which he is reading if it is not the one in common use. This is a simple courtesy.

Food, Drinks, and Days

There are matters of moral Indifference. These are actions that are neither right nor wrong in themselves. As mentioned above, they include foods, drinks, and observance of days. It is about these non-essential matters that Paul writes:

“Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5b). He would not have said this about a fundamental of the faith; but in matters of moral indifference, there is liberty for everyone to be fully convinced in his own mind.

“All things are lawful unto me” (I Cor. 6:12; 10:23). This can only refer to areas or activities not prohibited by God's Word, areas such as food and drink.

“All things Indeed are pure” (Rom. 14:20b). “Unto the pure all things are pure” (Tit. 1:15). This cannot mean all things absolutely, but all things that are neither right nor wrong in themselves.

“I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself” (Rom. 14:14a). The subject is foods. Under the Old Testament economy, certain foods were unclean. Under grace this distinction between clean and unclean no longer holds (Mark 7:19 NASB).

It should be clear that in these passages Paul is dealing with matters that are non-essential. He allows a difference of opinion among God's people, and yet it is often over these inconsequential matters that serious splits occur. We must learn to distinguish between what is central and what is peripheral.

Conclusion

Let us now summarize. Concerning the fundamentals, there must be unanimity in any Christian assembly.

Concerning matters that are Scripturally important, even though not fundamental. each assembly should adopt a position in the fear of God. Any contrary teaching, either public or private, that would create strife or division should not be allowed. If a person disagrees with the assembly position and feels he must leave out of faithfulness to the Lord, he should do so quietly and peaceably. Without seeking to draw others away with him.

Concerning the non-essential matters we have listed, there has to be a certain amount of give and take for the sake of unity and peace (Eph. 4:1-6). We may have strong convictions in these areas, but we must recognize that there are Christ-like souls who do not agree with us. Because of this, we should avoid excessive dogmatism. Cromwell said, “I beseech you by the tender mercies of Christ to conceive it possible that you may be mistaken.” When someone tried to nit-pick with Dr. Ironside on some nonessential matter, he would say, “Well, brother, when we get to heaven, one of us is going to be wrong--and perhaps it will be me.” The fire Invariably went out, because Dr. Ironside did not add fuel to it (Prov. 26:20).

Leaving an assembly over a non-essential matter is never the ideal. There can be fellowship without total agreement on these topics. Where there is love and brokenness, prayer and patience, humility and forbearance, differences can be settled amicably. Believers can disagree without being disagreeable.

In all the topics we have discussed, an assembly should adopt a definite stance or policy. Failure to do so results in confusion. Believers generally want guidelines to follow. When the leadership adopts a position after much waiting on God, there is a sense in which their decision is ratified in heaven (cf. Matt. 16:19; 18:18), provided it does not violate any **Scriptural precept or principle**.

The only times when it is better to leave is when a person is convinced that in staying he is being unfaithful to the Lord or unable to remain without disturbing the peace of the assembly. Even then the third line of Baxter's timeless formula applies--in everything, love.

Sample Statement of Doctrine

This assembly accepts the Bible as its divinely inspired authority in all matters. The following is what we believe the Bible teaches regarding the Christian faith.

Major Doctrines

The Bible. Every word in the original writings of the Holy Scriptures is inspired of God, authoritative and without error. The Bible is the only written revelation of God to man and is infallible (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; Prov. 30:5-6).

The Godhead. There is one God, existing eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable (Exod. 34:6-7; Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28: 19; John 4:24; 10:30; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:8-12).

Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is the eternal Son of God. He entered the human race miraculously by being born of a virgin. He did not sin and He could not sin. He died as a substitute for all the sins of the human race, was buried, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended to the Father's right hand, where He now ministers as our Great High Priest (Matt. 1:21-23; John 1:1, 14; Acts 1:9; Rom. 1:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:14-15; 7:25; 13:8; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18).

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicts and converts the sinner. He regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals all true believers in Christ and empowers them to live a holy life (Matt. 28:19; John 16:8; Rom. 8:9-16; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1: 12-14).

Man. Adam was created in the image and likeness of God and was an innocent being. He subsequently sinned, and as head of the human race he passed on a sinful nature to all mankind. All men are sinners by nature but also by practice. Apart from God's salvation man is lost eternally (Gen. 1:27; 9:6; Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1).

Sin. Sin is any violation of or disobedience to the revealed will of God. It is also a state, the absence of righteousness, or anything that falls short of the perfect glory of God. God has established that the penalty of sin is death (Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 3:23; Jas. 2:10; 4:17; Rev. 20:11-15).

Salvation. Without the shedding of the precious blood of Christ, there is no remission of sin. Salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and entirely apart from law-keeping or good works. It is entered into by all those who hear and understand the gospel, repent of their sins, and trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior (Mark 1:15; John 1:12-13; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Heb. 9:22).

The Assembly. The universal Church is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus from Pentecost to the Rapture. Each local assembly or church should be a miniature of the universal Church, expressing the great truths of the latter. The local assembly is made up of believers in the Lord Jesus who have been baptized following their conversion and who meet together for teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, and evangelism. Christ is the head of each assembly and He entrusts leadership to the elders, men who are recognized as Christ's under-shepherds. Each assembly is also to have deacons to serve the practical needs of the assembly (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:24-25, 30; Acts 6:3-6; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Heb. 13:17).

Ordinances. There are two Christian ordinances: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism by immersion signifies that the believer has died with Christ, has been buried with Him, and has risen to walk in newness of life with Him. The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast at which believers worship the Lord and show forth His death until He comes again. In accordance with the early church, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every Lord's day (Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 10:47-48; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:26).

Other Important Doctrines

Assurance and Security. All true believers can know that they are saved on the authority of the Word of God. Those who are in Christ are safe and secure for all eternity (John 10:28-29; Rom. 5:1; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 Jn. 5:13).

Christian Life and Priorities. Christians are called to live a holy life. They are to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and as such, to live lives of service and testimony in the power of the Holy Spirit. This service includes ministry in the assembly and propagation of the gospel to the whole world. They are forbidden by Christ to lay up treasures on earth and are promised a reward in heaven for faithfulness in serving God on earth (Matt. 6:19-34; Mark 8:34-35; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Jn. 2:6).

Spiritual Gifts. Christ gives to each believer, at conversion, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, some gift or gifts to equip him to serve the Lord and edify other believers. Gifts are given by a sovereign act of God's Spirit and not in response to the desires or prayers of men. Some gifts were foundational, and the miraculous gifts, such as healing, miracles, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, were gifts given as a sign to the Jews during the transitional period as the church was being

established. These foundational and miraculous gifts ceased when their purposes were accomplished (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11; 14:22; 2 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 2:20; 3:6; 4:11-12; Heb. 2:3-4).

Future Events. God has revealed different dispensations, or stewardships, with corresponding rules governing life and relationship with God. In every dispensation the way of salvation is by faith alone. The present dispensation is the age of grace. The church did not exist prior to this age, and does not take the place of Israel in the prophecies of Scripture. The personal, imminent return of the Lord Jesus to Rapture the Church will be followed in order by the tribulation. Christ's thousand-year reign on earth, and the eternal state of punishment for the unsaved and blessing for the saved (Matt. 24:21, 29-30; 25:46; Rom. 6:14; 1 Cor. 10:32; Eph. 3:2-6; Col. 1:25-27; 1 Thes. 4:13-18; 5:4-10; Heb. 7:18-19; Rev. 10:1-6).

Each believer in fellowship must be absolute agreement with the assembly on the MAJOR DOCTRINES in the doctrinal statement. In secondary matters nonessentials, or matters of moral indifference, there shall be liberty. However, those in fellowship who hold opposing views to the doctrinal statement of the assembly shall refrain from teaching their views either publicly or privately. No one shall be permitted to propagate views that are contrary to the doctrinal statement or that prove divisive.

A Sample Position Paper on Divorce and Remarriage

God instituted marriage for the human race before the Fall (Gen. 2:18-25) and the Lord Jesus blessed the institution of marriage by performing His first miracle at a wedding (Jn. 2:1-11). Marriage should be held in honor by all, and the marriage bed should be kept free from all defilement (Heb. 13:4 NASB).

God's will is that a person should have only one living partner in marriage (Eph. 5:33). The relationship should not be severed by man (Matt. 19:3-9), but should continue until the death of one partner (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39).

Divorce was never God's intention for His people. In fact, He hates unscriptural divorce (Mal. 2:16). However, under the law of Moses, divorce was permitted for almost any reason as long as a man gave his wife a certificate showing that she was put away legally (Deut. 24:1-4). This permission was granted because of the hardness or the people's hearts (Matt. 19:7, 8).

When Jesus came, He tightened the divorce law:

"I say unto you that every one who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matt. 5:32 NASB).

This means that marriage is indissoluble except when one partner is unfaithful. In that case, the innocent party is free to obtain a divorce. However, he does not have to obtain it; grace is able to triumph over his partner's sin. God is able to make even this work together for good (Rom. 8:28). But if the innocent party chooses to divorce his mate, he is free to

remarry; otherwise a divorce would be no different than separation.

If an unbeliever deserts a believer, the believer is not under bondage (I Cor. 7:16). This may mean that desertion is also a Scriptural ground for divorce. We believe, however, that it assumes that the unbeliever leaves to live in a sinful relationship, in which case the divorce would be permitted on the ground of unchastity (Matt. 6:32). In this instance, as in all instances, God's ideal is reconciliation.

Many people have already contracted unscriptural divorces and remarriages before their conversion. When they are born again, all such sins are covered by the blood of Christ (Eph. 1:7). The sins are forgiven and the new believer is expected to continue in whatever marriage relationship he is in at the time. If he is divorced without Scriptural cause and neither he nor his wife are remarried, he may be reconciled to his spouse or remain unmarried.

If a Christian is divorced for an unscriptural reason and then remarries, he commits adultery. This calls for his excommunication from the local church. Fellowship may also be denied to anyone who deliberately contracts an unscriptural divorce. However, even in such cases, if a man genuinely repents and confesses his sin, he is restored to fellowship with God and should be restored to fellowship with God's people.

Many complicated marital problems arise which are too involved to cover in a paper like this. Ultimately the elders will have to investigate thoroughly, try to hear all sides of the problem, then make a decision in the fear of God. The rest of the saints are obligated to abide by the decision of the elders and not create any disunity by taking sides against them.

Women's Role In the Church

(The following is a sample position paper which may prove helpful to elders in formulating their own.)

The pertinent Scripture passages are: I Corinthians 11:3-16; 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 and I Timothy 2:11-14. From these passages we learn of two areas of submission:

Submission through Head Covering

- i. A woman should have her head covered when she prays or prophesies. Otherwise she dishonors her head (I Cor. 11:5, 13).
- ii. The head covering in I Corinthians 11:5 is obviously a veil, not the woman's hair.
- iii. The reasons for this practice transcend time and culture.
 1. Order of creation (I Cor. 11:8).
 2. Purpose of creation (I Cor. 11:9).
 3. Onlooking angels (I Cor. 11:10).

Submission through Silence

iv. She should keep silent in the assembly. She is to learn in silence. She is not to speak or ask questions (I Cor. 14:34-35).

v. She should not teach or usurp authority over man (I Tim. 2:12).

vi. The reasons for this practice also transcend time and culture.

1. Order of creation (I Tim. 2:13).

2. Woman being deceived in the original sin (I Tim. 2:14).

We freely admit that there are difficulties in connection with the whole subject of women's place in the assembly. It is our desire to adhere as closely as possible to the Word of God; therefore, we have adopted the following position, in the fear of the Lord, until He gives us further light on the subject.

Meetings of the Assembly

An assembly meeting is a gathering consisting of the saints, the elders, and the deacons (Phil. 1:1), convened for the apostles' doctrine (teaching), fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). This would include the following meetings of those in fellowship at this chapel:

Sun. 11:00 A.M. Bible Teaching

6:00 P.M. Lord's Supper

Wed. 7:00 P.M. Prayer Meeting

The following are not considered meetings of the assembly:

Sun. 9:30 A.M. Sunday, School & Bible Training Classes

Thur. 1:30 P.M. Home Evangelistic Bible Study.

Women's Silence

During those meetings which are meetings of the assembly, the women should remain silent (except in the case of a prayer when the participants are divided according to sex and the women pray in groups by themselves). If they have prayer requests, comments or announcements, they can ask their husbands to share them. Unmarried women or women whose husbands are not in attendance may ask any of the men in the assembly to share them.

During the meetings that are not meetings of the assembly, the women are allowed to participate in the discussion and ask questions but not to lead men in prayer or teach men.

Sisters should be covered in all meetings, including those meetings that are not considered meetings of the assembly. In

the meetings of the assembly it is presumed that they will be praying silently. In the non-assembly meetings, it is also likely that women will be praying silently when men are present, and may be teaching other women and children when men are not present. Visitors, both saved and unsaved, will often come to all these meetings uncovered. Hopefully, they will learn by the example of our sisters, and eventually through direct teaching from the Word.

Ministries for Women

While the Scriptures set some limits on the exercise of a woman's priesthood, there are ministries which are open to her. In the local assembly, these include silent prayer and worship (I Cor. I 1:5; 14:35); teaching and personal work with other women and children (Tit. 2:3-5); and hospitality (Heb. 13:2). There are ministries open to her outside the assembly but in conjunction with it. These include raising a family for God (1 Tim. 2:15); giving (Luke 8:3); collaborating with her husband in support of his ministry; engaging in projects for missionaries at home and abroad, and visiting the sick and the afflicted.

Summary

Once again we emphasize that there are situations that are not clearly spelled out in the Word of God. Our desire is to adhere as closely as possible to the Scriptures. Also, we believe it is important for all who are in fellowship in this assembly to follow a consistent policy and thus avoid confusion. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

The Prayer Meeting

The prayer meeting was in progress. A few older saints had met for that purpose in an upper room of the chapel. But no one was praying. No one was saying a word. The silence was deafening. Then the stillness was broken by the slow, heavy clumping of footsteps on the stairs. A large black woman entered the room and sat down. Still no one prayed. Finally she couldn't stand it any longer. She lifted up her voice and prayed. "Lawd, ah knows this place is dead. You knows this place is dead. It's the deadest place either of us has been in for a long time." Then she rose and departed. After that there were no silent periods in that particular meeting. Perhaps she was an angel, sent to revive a dying prayer meeting, and a dying assembly.

There is no reason why a prayer meeting can't be meaningful, interesting and effective. And a meeting like this is guaranteed to be well-attended. Yet in many churches today the prayer meeting has been given up as a lost cause and replaced by a small group fellowship, a teaching service or a time of "sharing".

Some of the factors that have contributed to the death of the prayer meeting are participation by only the same few people every week: predictable prayers; long, dull pauses; crowding out of prayer by other activities. How can we deal with these problems?

First we must humbly acknowledge that there is a problem and then be willing to make changes.

Generally speaking it is true that people enjoy a meeting when they have some part in it themselves. So our first goal is to increase participation in the prayer meeting. How can we do this in a Scriptural manner? Suggestion: have the men break up in small groups and pray in one section of a fairly large room, and the women do the same in another area of the same room. Movable chairs are ideal for this arrangement; fixed pews are not.

In a meeting like this everyone has the opportunity to pray, and in small groups, people usually pray more than once.

But of course there has to be a good supply of fuel for prayer. This need not be a problem. The person opening the meeting asks for worship and praise items; prayer requests; answers to prayer; etc. The Christians know that they should come equipped with paper and pencil to write down these requests; there will be far too many to remember.

Preliminaries such as singing, announcements, etc. should be kept to a minimum. Prayer is the main thing. Even ministry of the Word could be advantageously planned for another time.

When the praying begins, there is a low, sacred sound of praise and petition filling the room, but no confusion. People hear only the prayers being offered in their own group.

The time will pass quickly. Young people will feel free to participate freely. Everyone will welcome the change.

The experience of multitudes is that prayer in a format like this is a joy and not just a duty. It is so stimulating that people don't want to stay away. There is a sense of personal involvement, or sharing the joys and sorrows of others, and of seeing answers to prayer continually.

Privileges of Fellowship

In an Assembly

The promised presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20).

The privilege of collective worship (The Lord's Supper-- I Cor. 11).

The privilege of collective prayer (Acts 2:42).

Instruction In the Word.

The blessing of serving with others:

Sunday School teaching

Gospel

Visitation

Tract work, etc.

The privilege of giving.

The privilege of fellowship.

The family tie in times of trial.

A worldwide fellowship.

Responsibilities of Fellowship

In the Assembly

Exercise one's own spiritual gift.

Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit.

Attend meetings faithfully.

Share in expenses and in fellowship with commended workers.

Pursue personal holiness.

Practice mutual help, exhortation and edification.

Love one another (I Pet. 4:8).

Share in the ministry of hospitality.

Share in work at the Chapel-- cleaning, etc.

Decently and in Order

The Public Meetings of the Assembly

In discussing the conduct of public meetings of the church, the Apostle Paul ends with this admonition: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40). The NIV says to let them be done in a "fitting and orderly way." The NASB renders it, "properly and in an orderly manner."

Whatever the version, the meaning seems clear. The Spirit of God desires that our public meetings be such as to inspire a sense that "God is truly among you" (v. 25). We need to consider the one who occupies the place of the uninformed" (NKJV v. 16), not just the initiated ones. Certainly we do not wish unbelievers to come in, observe our services and say,

"You are out of your mind" (v. 23). It is to be desired that "all things be done for edification" (v. 26), not confusion or boredom.

It may not be apparent to us who are familiar with the ways in which we conduct public meetings of the church that others sometimes do not find things being done "decently and in order." They think that we appear to be disorganized, haphazard, and casual to the point of disrespect to the Lord and Savior we seek to honor. If we have as our goal the retention of those who visit our meetings, especially those who are serious about God, then we ought to consider how to improve things. In most instances, we cannot think of a Scripture that forbids such changes as we would suggest. However, I Corinthians 14:40 would seem to support the need for upgrading in a serious way how we do things.

Many disastrous occurrences or arrangements seem to be the product of a mindset which regards unplanned disorder and uncritical repetition as being somehow a matter of leaving it all to the Spirit. It does not seem fair to blame God for the kind of things sometimes taking place. Another mistake is to assume that, in the name of giving opportunity for the development of gift, all the males of the assembly be given a turn at almost everything. This really ignores whether there is any indication that they have such gift. If we take seriously I Corinthians 12 and like passages, it should be evident that not all brethren are public preachers, song-leaders or chairmen by divinely-given aptitude. Perhaps they could better serve in the areas of helps, service, mercy and hospitality-where there is a great lack.

In the interest of improving our public meetings, we offer the following checklist, which is only a partial one, for starters. Much could be said beyond these few suggestions.

Meetings

People come to church to sense the presence of God. Is this what is conveyed in your service? Or is it more like a luncheon club or public social hour? At times we sound like a convention of magpies.

Whether or not you consider the service to be devoted to "worship" -- there needs to be an atmosphere of reverence for God and awareness of Him when Scriptures are read or expounded and when prayer is made. A reverential atmosphere is maintained when we hold latecomers at the door during these parts of the service.

Get your audience in their seats and quiet (hopefully) at the starting time. Encourage this in your bulletin. Pre-service music may help. Example by "regulars" is important. Good ushering is essential.

Discourage wandering up and down the aisles during preaching and praying. Seat late comers at the rear, parents with small children, or those needing to visit the restroom frequently, to sit it the back, not at the front or in the middle of a row. The church service is not a bus terminal. It is amazing how wanderlust and physical "urgency" assault people in one brief hour on Sunday.

Prayer -- Scripture Reading

Pray to God as though He has heard your prayer and make it one that needs His favorable response. Remember that it was the Pharisee who "prayed thus with himself" (Luke 18:11). Make sure listeners can hear and join in thought.

Be brief in prayer. Jesus condemned long public prayers, especially if they were to impress others.

Public Scripture readings also should be brief. People cannot retain and focus on too many thoughts or verses. Identify the main thought you are seeking to emphasize and relate it to the sermon to be preached.

Read the Word slowly, reverently, distinctly, with proper emphasis. The reader should look up at times to make eye contact with the audience. Have the people stand and listen with respect (Neh. 8:5). The effect can be electric.

Announcements

These should be distinct, easily heard, enthusiastic, warm, friendly. The announcer should wear a coat and tie. He should look at his audience when talking -- not at his notes

Know in advance the details, proper pronunciation of names, correct times, written on a single sheet -- NO last minute slips of paper, with indecipherable scribbling, should be accepted en route to the platform.

Be brief -- brief -- brief! Use "handouts" at the door for details. Signup sheets should be made available after the service, not during it.

Don't trivialize the service by trivial announcements.

Don't repeat previous announcements of routine meeting times. Don't read announcements already in the church bulletin. Refer the listeners to the bulletin.

Avoid jargon and in house' phrases, referring to speakers as "Bill" or "Joe" when they are unknown to the visitors.

Introduce the speaker properly with warm enthusiasm. Use his full name, say something about him and his subject of ministry or sermon title. It is a discourtesy not to present a speaker properly to his audience.

Never use slang, such as referring to men as "guys" or inviting visitors to "hang around" after a meeting. or using other undignified language. Speak with what is called "class" or good platform manners.

Ushers

Choose warm, friendly people who can greet visitors or others in a gracious way, making them feel welcome. Don't just assign people to handouts hymnbooks or bulletins. People sense when they are receiving a plastic smile and a mechanical handshake or greeting.

Guide people to their seats (true ushering), filling the front sections first. Rope off the back areas for late comers.

Wear a coat and tie--not casual dress.

Train those ushering in special sessions to emphasize how to improve their function. Have a regular, dependable crew who know what they are doing.

Music

The song-leader should be the most gifted person for this role. Variety here is not "the spice of life" but apt to be "the joke of the week."

Hymns should never be picked out at the last minute, any more than the song-leader. Match the hymns with the message, where possible. Be sure the audience knows the hymns, or arrange to teach them one at a time. Please do not ask for favorites from the audience. Consider the effect when either the songleader or the audience does not know the song.

Use a fresh, contemporary, Scriptural, inspiring hymn or chorus from time to time. That will require a survey and screening process beforehand.

Coordinate hymns ahead of time with your accompanist (where used) so that there is no mix-up.

Be careful in selecting soloists or groups for "special music." Not all of it is good. The service is not the community "amateur hour." Make sure dress is neat and appropriate. Verify arrangements in advance; inquire on needed sound equipment.

Reduce the "between hymns chatter" or commentary. Stick to the main task. The song-leader is not chosen to be a "funny man", cheerleader, or preacher. Bring reverence as well as spiritual vitality to our singing. The Scottish people excel at this as they sing the Psalms.

When preaching time must be abbreviated because of too many hymns or too many stanzas, there is a miscarriage in proper emphasis. Fit the music into its agreed time frame.

Visitors

It says something when visitors come once and never return. What it says is not good!

Warmth, friendliness, love, and a welcoming atmosphere are the chief characteristics noted by visitors. This often is more important than the sermon itself.

Please get visitors' names, addresses, phone numbers, and the "contact" through whom they happened to visit. Make sure they are introduced to others. See that friendly people talk to them after the service.

Keep records of all visitors. Send a warm welcome letter and something about the assembly that is oriented to their needs or interest.

Call them on the telephone the same week they came. Visit in person as soon as possible. Invite them to a meal. Have a hospitality program for new comers, sporadic attendees and even neglected people in the assembly.

Is your assembly a "private club" or is it genuinely open to newcomers? How do you show this?

Have care for infants and smaller children at services. Let teams be varied so that all can hear the Word some of the time. Why let crying, restless children disturb the meeting for all? If mothers insist on bringing their children, seat them at the rear and encourage taking them out when they disturb the meeting.

Is your building neat and well-maintained? Are your restrooms neat and clean? Is there an adequate, highly-visible, attractive sign out front which is lighted at night? Is the yard well maintained? Is the parking adequate? Can the members park away from the chapel and leave the near places for visitors?

In Summary

Have the people who are the most fitted for a particular job be the ones who do it. This is Scriptural. Give instructions, using written materials such as this to emphasize the proper way to do things. Seek constantly to upgrade all of your functions. Nothing is too good in the service of the King. Pray and plan ahead. This can be more "of the Spirit" than last minute "confusion worse confounded." Glorify God in your public services. That should be your first priority.

O. J. Gibson

Parachurch Organizations

PRO

Parachurch organizations carry on ministries that the church cannot do, or should be doing but is not, e.g., translation, publishing, radio, TV, prison work, evangelism, discipline, counseling, etc.

They reach vast segments of the population that are untouched by the churches.

Many people who are turned off by the church ("all the church wants is your money") can be effectively reached by parachurch ministries.

In missions, social services, evangelism and church planting, parachurch organizations have taken the lead.

Whereas the organized church often requires formalized training for its full-time workers, the parachurch organizations train lay persons and put them to work.

They provide ministry outlets that Christians do not find in local churches.

They provide honorable, salaried employment for some.

They are effectively bearing fruit. God is blessing them.

Churches tend to emphasize buildings more than missions.

Churches are inflexible, resistant to change. Parachurch organizations are an answer to this lack of flexibility.

CON

Parachurch organizations are unbiblical. They are nowhere found in the Acts or elsewhere in the New Testament. The church is God's unit on earth for propagating the faith. Everywhere the apostles went they planted churches. Everywhere we go we establish parachurch organizations.

Men and women are diverted from the local church. Preachers, teachers and leaders are taken away from their primary ministry and seated behind a desk as administrators.

Money is diverted from the local church, yet these organizations depend on the churches for their support.

People serving with a parachurch organization cannot carry out the Great Commission "teaching to observe all things" because they cannot declare the full counsels of God. In trying to relate to many different churches, they tend to weaken their doctrinal position.

There are many overlapping and competing ministries, with factions, jealousies and rivalries.

They are not accountable to anyone but themselves.

Some parachurch people tend to be antichurch.

Others who have a parachurch mentality often find it difficult to adapt to the fellowship of a local church and to function with the broad mix of people found in most congregations. They consider themselves (and often are) a select group of committed people.

They usurp functions and responsibilities that belong to the churches.

Instead of feeding converts into local churches, the organization tends to take the place of the church in the lives of the people.

Arguments Against Parachurch Organizations That May Be Equally True Of Churches

They do not die easily but are often perpetuated after they have outlived their usefulness.

There is a danger of focusing on a charismatic leader, and of thus establishing a personality cult.

They do not meet the total needs of the people.

They are often characterized by competitive spirit, infighting, duplication of ministries. and divisions.

They are sometimes the result of a person's inability to work with others. In frustration he starts a work where he can be independent.

They promote professionalism, climbing up the corporate ladder, etc.