

## EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

### **THE CHURCH IS AN ORGANISM**

The church is depicted by many different images throughout the New Testament. I think it is significant that they are all LIVING entities: a body, a vineyard, a bride, a living temple made up of living stones, a family, one new man, a field, an army, a city, etc.

The church is a living organism, not an institution.

The church that dances across the pages of the New Testament was **ORGANIC**. Organic means that it was born from the Spirit, sustained by the Spirit, rather than constructed by human hands and ideas. It was not controlled by human hierarchy, shaped by lifeless rituals, or held together by programs.

When we try to start a church the same way we would start a corporation we defy the organic principle of church life.

All life forms have DNA – a genetic code. DNA gives each life form its specific expression: physical and psychological. The DNA of the church comes from God himself.

Look at the DNA expression of God. Mary was found with child of the Holy Ghost. God overshadowed Mary and she conceived. Jesus was born of God of incorruptible seed. Watch what happens after this birth:

### **THE FATHER’S LIFE IS SHARED WITH THE SON**

John 5:26 and 6:57 that the son lives by the life of the Father.

John 13:31-32 says that the son shared and expressed the glory of the Father.

John 5:19 says the son lives in complete dependence on the Father.

John 1:18 and 14:10 says that son lives within the Father and the Father within the son.

John 12:49 and 14:9 says that the son reflects the Father in his words and deeds.

John 1:14 and 8:50 says the Father glorifies the son and John 7:18 says the son exalts the Father.

**ALL THINGS ARE MUTUAL:** mutual love, mutual fellowship, mutual dependence, mutual honor, mutual submission, mutual dwelling, mutual community. Complimentary and reciprocal interchange of divine life, divine love, and divine fellowship.

### **THROUGH CHRIST, THE SAME LIFE IS SHARED WITH THE CHURCH**

The church is an organic extension of God himself. It was conceived in Christ before time (Ephesians 1:4-5) and it was born on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

Properly conceived, the church is a gathered community that shares God’s life and expresses it in the earth. Ephesians 2:23, “which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”.

When a group of Christians follow their spiritual DNA, they will have a natural expression, and that expression will match the DNA of Christ himself.

Look at the God come in the flesh, the mighty God in Christ. Look at the relationship and see what is NOT THERE: there is an absence of command-style leadership. There's an absence of passive spectatorship. There's an absence of one-upmanship. There's an absence of performance. There's an absence of rituals and programs. All of these were created by fallen humans and they run contrary to the DNA of the church of Jesus Christ.

## **RESTORING THE ORGANIC CHURCH: Four Views**

### **1) Follow the Biblical Blueprint**

There is a meticulous blueprint laid out in the New Testament church practice. Mimic that blueprint. We must be careful that we do not do with the New Testament what the Jews did with the Old Testament: turn it into a list of rules and practices which are binding for all time and in all places.

### **2) Adapting to Cultural**

Human culture changes and so we must adapt to our culture. The church must consistently reinvent itself to stay relevant. We end up creating the church in our own image. There are normative church practices that must transcend time and culture.

### **3) Post-church Christianity**

This is an attempt to practice Christianity without belonging to an identifiable community that regularly meets for worship, prayer, fellowship, and mutual edification. They seek for spontaneous social interaction (like a coffee-shop) and personal friendships is what embodies the "church". It is amorphous, nebulous, and phantom. The first century churches were identifiable, visible communities that met regularly in a particular place. This was how Paul could write letters to them and even knew who he could depend on to be present to hear what was written. He also knew the places where they gathered and experienced life together. To forego this is to desire intimacy without commitment.

### **4) The Organic Church**

The DNA of God is resident in his body. The church's DNA never changes. The church will always reflect the headship of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the authority and the source of the church. The church will always allow and encourage every member of the body functioning. The church will always map out the theology of the New Testament giving it visible expression on the earth. The church will always be grounded in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. The church is a loving, egalitarian, reciprocal, cooperative, nonhierarchical community. Being organic, the church develops with time from the life that is already present with it.

## **THE TROUBLE OFTEN FOUND WITH HUMAN STRUCTURE**

Many human-invented practices have the capacity to reshape and redefine the church. These practices can undermine the headship of Christ, hinder the every-member-functioning body, violate the theology of the New Testament, and disconnect people from true and deep fellowship, dependence, and reliance on Jesus Christ. Often, the human-invented structures, programs, and ideas literally change the fundamental character of the New Testament Church.

## **THE POWER OF TRADITIONS**

We know that God's Word is incredibly powerful and carries with it the might of God himself. Isaiah said "the word of God stands forever". The writer of Hebrews declared that the word of God is "living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to the dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and the attitudes of the heart." Again, God said his word "will not return to me empty". Yet, as powerful, capable, and all-

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encompassing as God's word is, there is one thing that will stop it dead in its tracks: the traditions of men.

The word became flesh and dwelt among us; and even the Word himself said, "Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition." (Matthew 15:16) In Mark 7:8-9 he said, "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men... You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

Many of our modern church practices are without Scriptural merit; some simply steal energy and focus from the church herself, but the real danger lies with those practices that are at odds with the organic nature of the church and violate her DNA to the enthronement of man's ideas and traditions. Then, many proof-text the Scriptures to justify their actions and maintain a narrative.

I am afraid that in my ways the church has been contextualized to cultures and ideologies that she has been shifted from her original state. When the Greeks got ahold of the church they added in philosophy. The Romans took the church and added in government and paganism. The Europeans took the church and turned it into a dead culture. They shipped it across the sea to America and they turned it into a business and added entertainment. Now, the American church has sent missionaries across the world, even back to the East where the church originated, and we try to teach them how to have "church; often, very far removed from what you find Scripturally.

## **WHAT THE CHURCH PRODUCES WHEN ALLOWED TO MANIFEST ITS DNA**

The common identifiable features of the organic church are authentic community, a familial love and devotion to one another, the centrality of Christ, the native instinct to gather together without static ritual, the desire to form deep relationships with Christ as the center, a drive for every member functioning gatherings, and the loving passion to display Jesus to a very fallen world.

## **INTERRUPTING THE ORGANIC FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**

Genie was a thirteen-year-old girl who was discovered in November of 1970. She was limited to a very socially and sensory deprived state since early childhood. She was never taught to speak. She was denied human interaction, being kept isolated in a small, darkened room. She was tied to a potty chair and left alone day after day. At night she was tied up and placed in a sleeping bag which restrained her movement. She was beaten any time she made noises, including trying to form words. The result: her natural traits were permanently distorted. She had a strange bunny-like walk, held her hands up in front of her like paws, she couldn't chew solid food and could hardly swallow. She was spitting all the time, sniffled constantly, and she couldn't focus beyond twelve feet in front of her. Her speech was limited to short high-pitched squeaks that were barely understandable.

Once Genie was rescued, things began changing slowly. Her vocabulary began to grow. However, she could never make sentences. Doctors, scientists and specialists concluded that, due to her intense deprivation, lack of nutrition, and stimulation, there were actually several noticeable changes in her DNA.

The culture in which an organic church is born may change its expression. If tied to a pew she will experience radical damage to her mobility. If kept from community life and fellowship her

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ability to communicate and speak well will be altered. Left to the confines of a building she will lose her focus outside the parameters of that place. If the church is left to herself without human inventions and restrictions, she will manifest the greatest potential of her DNA: Jesus Christ.

## THE CHURCH MEETING

“Going to church” nor “church services” appear in the New Testament. Early churches did not see the church as a place to go and they didn’t see their gatherings as “services”.

### FIVE TYPES OF MEETINGS

- 1) **Apostolic Meetings:** Apostolic workers teaching and preaching to an interactive group as in the Temple Court and in the Hall of Tyrannus. Equipping the body to function under the headship of Jesus Christ.
- 2) **Evangelistic Meetings:** Preaching the gospel in places where unbelievers were found: Synagogue & market place.
- 3) **Decision Making Meetings:** Gathering to make an important decision. (Acts 15)
- 4) **Prayer Meetings:** Gathering to pray for specific needs and God’s intervention.
- 5) **Church Meetings:** Regular gatherings of the church.

## MUTUAL EDIFICATION

The modern church service is designed for worship, the hearing of a sermon, and in some cases, evangelism. In New Testament the governing purpose of the church gathering was mutual edification.

### 1 Corinthians 14:26 (NASB)

**What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.**

### Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)

**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the Day approaching.**

Mutual exhortation is an antidote for preventing apostasy, ensuring perseverance, and cultivating individual spiritual life. It is the remedy for a hardened heart and a deceived mind.

### Hebrews 3:12-13

**Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**

## EVERY MEMBER PARTICIPATION

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### **Ephesians 4:16**

**From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.**

This is why the New Testament uses the phrase “one another” nearly sixty times. No one took center stage. They were all pointed toward the same purpose of mutual edification.

Every member had the right, the privilege, and the responsibility to minister something OF CHRIST in the gathering. “EVERY ONE OF YOU” was it’s outstanding characteristic. Mutual encouragement was the hallmark. Total participation was the “round table” atmosphere. Rather than the active few and the passive many it was the active many and the passive few, if any. Every member functioning is not just a good idea, but a divine rule, and spiritual outflow. Everything flows out of the living presence of Christ.

### **1 Corinthians 14:31**

**For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.**

Freedom, openness, and spontaneity are the chief marks of this meeting. “One another” is it’s dominant feature. Mutual edification is it’s primary goal.

If Christ is allowed to lead the meeting, then everything will be done in an orderly fashion. (1 Corinthians 14:40). Even the interruptions were divinely inspired and common. (1 Corinthians 14:27-40)

## **WHY DID THE EARLY CHURCH FUNCTION THIS WAY?**

Did they do this because this was the infancy of the church and they didn’t have the development or spiritual maturity to function properly just yet? Was it because of her ignorance and immaturity?

### **1 Peter 2:5**

**Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.**

There is a necessity of a functioning priesthood. This priesthood is made up of all believers in Christ. Paul said that all believers are functioning members of Christ’s body. The nature of the gathering is to pour out into others what God has poured into them.

## **THINK OF REVIVALS PAST**

If you have been a student to great revivals and awakenings you will find some common occurrences. The first, preachers would stop giving sermons for some time; instead, God’s people would gather, pray, sing, testify, share about the Lord for hours. God’s people were yielding to their spiritual instincts! After that tidal wave of the Spirit receded, the old order of service was quickly picked back up.

## **A SELF-EMPTYING EXCHANGE**

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God gives life. God gives love. God gives fellowship. Then we come together in a self-emptying exchange of this life, love, and fellowship.

### **A REAL PLACE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

#### **Ephesians 4:11-16**

**<sup>1</sup> And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the [a]edifying of the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; <sup>14</sup> that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, <sup>15</sup> but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**

The gathering is a God-created environment where spiritual growth comes both individually and corporately. We grow in his fullness when the other members of the body minister to one another. The spiritual nourishment of the believer must not be limited to or dependent upon the spiritual and academic preparedness of one or two people.

#### **Ephesians 3:16-19**

**<sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

### **WORKING WITH A FULL STAFF**

The multiplicity of ministries is the standard for the church.

The reformation recovered the understanding of the priesthood of all believers; however, it failed to restore the practices that make this a reality. The priesthood is not individualistic; it is not the priesthood of some believers.

The all-participatory meeting express Christ through a fully employed priesthood.

### **THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE AND GOD'S PERSPECTIVE**

The church is Christ expressed through a body of believers. From the human perspective the gathering is for the mutual edification of each believer, but from God's perspective the purpose of the gathering is to express Jesus Christ and make him visible. We gather so Christ can manifest himself in his fullness.

Make no mistake: The Lord Jesus Christ cannot be fully expressed and disclosed through any one member of the body. He is far too rich for that!

## **IT'S NOT JUST AN ASSEMBLY BUT ASSEMBLING OF CHRIST**

The highest purpose of the church meeting, then, is to make the invisible Christ visible through his body. We gather to reassemble the Lord Jesus Christ on the earth. Christ is glorified, every member is edified, and something is registered in the un-seen realms: principalities and powers in heavenly places are shamed.

Christ, the power and wisdom of God is made manifest! (1 Corinthians 1:24)

**His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished [fashioned] in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:10–11)**

## **PLANNED AND ORDERLY**

Open participatory meetings do not do away with planning nor are they disorderly.

## **ABSOLUTELY CENTERED ON CHRIST**

The meeting is centered on Christ. Every word sheds light on Him. Every song is about Him. Every prayer brings Him into view. All in the meeting point to Him. The excess and overflow of the private fellowship with Him is shared and released so that all can be blessed. It is more about giving than receiving.

## **WHAT PROPELS AND FUELS THE GATHERING?**

In a typical church service what propels the gathering is the church order and program. The service moves in a sequence that is forced by agenda or schedule. If the Spirit of the Lord is manifest or present or not, the service just forges ahead. The sermon would be preached, the songs sung, and the dismissal made. In the organic gathering, however, the sustaining and compelling force is the life of Christ. The spiritual life of the individual members maintain the church's existence and the quality of the gathering.

If the spiritual life of the gathering is at a low ebb, everyone notices it in the gathering. You cannot overlook the cold chill of silence and the lifeless action, if any. If the Spirit of God leaves the meetings, the whole thing collapses. The early church knew no other sustaining influence other than the Holy Ghost.

The Lord had abandoned the tabernacle of Moses. Even though God's glory had departed, worshippers continued to offer their sacrifices and go through the motions at the empty tabernacle. (1 Chronicles 16:39-40)

While organized and institutionalized church services are essentially "flawless", organic meetings will vary depending on the spiritual condition and spiritual preparedness of each member.

## **GOD'S PEOPLE MUST BE PROPERLY EQUIPPED TO FUNCTION UNDER CHRIST'S HEADSHIP**

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Christians do not become equipped by listening to sermons week after week while sitting muted in a chair. Christian workers must equip and train the saints how to fellowship the Lord and how to function in a group setting.

### **THE INFANCY STAGES**

There will be times when someone brings unprofitable ministry. Some will over-function, some will be passive, or bring unedifying ministry – all of these need to be given instruction; some need instruction on how to step back a bit, others need emboldened to function more often. This falls on the shoulders of those who are planting the work or are seasoned among the gathering.

Paul never shut down meetings even though he was met with a frenzied mix of chaos in Corinth. He didn't stop open-participatory meetings and hand out a schedule and choose the speakers. Instead, he supplied some broad guidelines to facilitate order and edification in the gatherings.

Paul was confident that they would adhere to those guidelines because he was their apostolic worker; every church in the first century had at its disposal a apostolic worker who helped it navigate through common problems. The job of the Apostolic worker is to put the meeting back into the hands of the Holy Ghost.

### **RESTRAINING ELDAD AND MEDAD**

In Numbers 11:26-27 the Spirit of God comes upon two servants of the Lord, Eldad and Medad. They begin to prophesy. A man stands and urges Moses to restrain them. Moses reproves the man saying that it was his hope that all God's people would prophesy. Moses desire was fulfilled at Pentecost.