

A Biblical Case for Doing Church Differently or “I want My church back.”

By Bev Potter

Back in 2012 the Lord began highlighting a Bible verse which describes how worship is to be done and indicates that His way of doing church is far different from what we have come to know and practice. The verse has been in our Bibles the entire time, but why has it been overlooked? And why is the Lord highlighting it now? I would suggest that the time has come to take a good look at how and why things are done in the church and consider that the Lord may well be wanting things to change.

The verse is found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 14, verse 26 under the heading *Orderly Worship* in the NIV version. It reads as follows: “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. **All these must be done for the strengthening of the church.**” (emphasis added)

The Lord confirmed to me His focus on this verse by having a brother in the congregation stand up and share it on two, possibly three occasions. He was aware that he was repeating himself, but he said he would continue to share it as often as the Lord led him to. He respectfully pointed out that the pastor may have something valuable to say, but there is no Biblical precedent for him to carry the full weight of bringing revelation to the body. Unfortunately, there was no response from the leadership, other than a “Thank you for sharing”, then continuing on as if nothing had been said – no discussion, no acknowledgement, perhaps even no perception that this was the Word of the Lord and no change occurred whatsoever.

The Holy Spirit then began revealing other related verses to me. For example, in Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus instructs his disciples: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. *Not so with you.* Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and

whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (emphasis added)

Jesus also said in Matthew 23:8-10, “But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant.”

And again, concerning corporate gatherings, we read these instructions in our Bible: (1 Cor. 14:29) “Two or three prophets should speak and the others should evaluate what is said. And if someone sitting down receives a revelation, the person who is speaking should conclude. For you can all prophesy one after another, so all can learn and be encouraged.” This verse indicates that it is the Holy Spirit directing the meetings and bringing the revelation. Paul makes it clear that there was an open forum for people to participate as the Holy Spirit gave inspiration.

As believers we are to trust in and obey the Lord. That means we are to be led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14) and no man should come between us and Him. “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim 2:5)

The apostles never considered themselves to be “above” the other believers, but co-workers for Christ. 2Cor 1:24 “*Not that we lord it over your faith*, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.” (emphasis added)

“The Lord is at work *in us* to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Phil 2:13, emphasis added) And since God is able to speak through a donkey, should He not be given the opportunity to speak through whichever member of the congregation He chooses? I see a system where essentially 95% of the people are sitting with gags over their mouths. One of the leadership may come and remove one of the gags temporarily, but if they don’t like what comes out, they will quickly replace it. The example comes to mind of a time when my husband was asked to pray during the service. He consented, waited on the Lord,

received a picture of Jesus overturning the money-changers' tables in the temple and prayed it out. He was never asked to pray in the service again, although he was leading the Sunday evening prayer meetings at the time.

These verses indicate how the early church functioned, so how and when did things change? Looking back in church history, we find that as early as about 100 AD, Ignatius of Antioch, purported to be a student of John, allegedly wrote, "your bishop in each Church presides *in the place of God*... neither do anything without the bishop..."(2) (emphasis added) Also, "Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop... He who honours the bishop has been honoured by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop does [in reality] serve the devil."(3) This is absolutely heretical, as it completely contradicts the previous verses we've looked at, and the Bible as a whole. We are to serve God first and foremost.

Correspondingly, John wrote, "... even now many antichrists have come... They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us: but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." (1 John 2:18-19) It is my conviction that, if indeed Ignatius was a student of John and if indeed he wrote the words attributed to him, then he was also one of these who left and was not of the true believers of John. The writings show the author to be of the antichrist spirit, which lifts itself up rather than lifting up Jesus as our Saviour (1 John 4:3) and the only mediator between God and man.

Let me be clear. Every leader who says, "follow me" rather than "follow Jesus" is of the antichrist spirit. Paul said "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." (1 Cor 11:1), meaning "follow Jesus". Jesus said, "therefore go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt 28:19) Disciples of whom? Jesus, of course! How many times did our Lord tell us "Follow Me"? He submitted himself to God, even unto death. He said to the Father, "Not my will, but Yours be done." That is our high calling.

The Church is not a hierarchy. It is a family. And we have one Father – our Father in Heaven. It is a body. And we have one Head – the

Lord Jesus Christ. And the cohesive, binding element is not control. It is love. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of God.

So, why the alternative title? Many years ago, when I was a young Christian, the Lord spoke to me in the shower. He said, very clearly, "Tell [the pastor] I want my church back." I knew I was to tell him simply that. When he asked for an explanation, I could only direct him to the Lord. I knew the Lord would give him the understanding he needed.

Then, in 2013 or 14, I attended a meeting with a well-known prophet and was led by the Holy Spirit to lay prostrate at the front. This minister told me he did not allow that in his meetings and told me to move. The weight of the Spirit was so heavy that it took all my effort to pick myself up and go to the back of the church where I lay back down, right behind the last row of chairs, out of the way of everybody. On my way to the back, the minister kept talking about not being offended, but I had the sense that he was talking as much to himself as to me. Then this minister, who could no longer even see me, began to insist that "this was not a time for laying down, but rising up..." At that time I sensed I was just being bullied, and that the Lord wanted me to remain where I was, which I did. After the service, when I got up, the minister again spoke about not being offended and I waved to say, "Don't worry, I'm ok."

That evening I went home and sought the Lord in desperation. I was confused and humiliated. I thought He had led me to the front to lie prostrate and I had sensed His Spirit on me strongly while I was there. Then even when I went to the back, I was bullied and told to move. I tried to be obedient and tried to submit to the "leadership", but I couldn't figure out what I had done wrong. Finally the Lord spoke to me. He said, "**I** did not tell you to move." Then I realized that some of what we consider to be authority in the church is not true authority. In Acts 5:29, Peter and the other apostles proclaimed, "We must obey God rather than human beings." The Lord has ultimate authority.

Then again, recently, at the beginning of 2015, the Lord had me attend a local church. I attended the grand opening of the church and the Lord had me share the same verse I wrote of at the beginning of this

article (1Cor 14:26). Then the Holy Spirit began prompting me to do and say things, and I was doing my best to be obedient and discerning. Eventually, the pastor began shutting this down. I prayed and asked the Lord about what was happening and He impressed upon me once again, "I want My church back." The picture He gave me was of an ornate gold gilded bird cage with beautifully coloured birds inside. He lifted the cage off its base and the birds flew, free at last.

In essence, I believe the Lord is challenging the clergy/laity dichotomy, and the unbiblical hierarchical structure currently adhered to by the church. According to the current service format, if one is not part of the "leadership", one must request permission from the leadership to obey the Holy Spirit in the context of a corporate gathering. The word "hierarchy" comes from the Greek words **iereus** "priest" + **arche**, amongst others, "first place or power, rule" (rule of the priest). The Catholic Church cites the writings of Ignatius of Antioch as indicating when this pattern of governance emerged, circa 100 AD, which is to say that the early church did not have this structure which, as we can see by the previous scriptures, is unbiblical. (See note #4)

Here I will share a picture my husband received as he was overseeing a Sunday evening prayer meeting during the same time frame in which the Lord began emphasizing these verses. He saw what looked like a spring-form pan with strings attached around the top of it. The tops of these strings were held by a black bird with a red mark across its face, flying so that the pan was being carried through the air. Our sense was that the pan represented the organized church. These "strings" were all black except for one that was silver. As prayer continued, all the strings were broken, except the silver one, which caused the pan to tip, so it was no longer level. At first we thought that silver was a good thing, but then we realized that it represented finances or mammon (something that is trusted in, besides God). It would seem that the leadership was not willing to give up financial security to move with God. An interesting thing about a spring-form pan is that, with one flick of the finger, the bottom falls out. Perhaps the structure is not as secure as the people inside it think.

I believe it is the Lord's desire that the man-made structure and form of the church be dismantled, and that the children of God would be

free to be led by the Spirit of God in the corporate context, aligned with the will of God as expressed in the scriptures.

To sum up, I believe the Lord has clarified from the scriptures He highlighted to me that the current format is clearly unscriptural and either we hold up the Bible as the authoritative Word of God or we don't, but we do not have the option to pick and choose which scriptures apply to our lives. The simple solution is to begin by creating an open forum for all believers to share and participate as the Holy Spirit prompts and for pastors to lay down the notion that they are to be mediators between the church and God in the corporate setting.

In addition, individuals in the congregations must also realize that they are not to put any man in place of God in their lives. "Therefore, let no man glory in men. / No more boasting about human leaders." (1Cor 3:21) The context of this verse is a situation where people were boasting about which apostle or disciple they were following. Are we not to be imitators of Christ? It is our responsibility to seek the Lord in all things.

May the Lord impart to us all the spirit of the fear of the LORD, so that we might be careful not to touch the "ark of the covenant" (that which carries the Spirit of God), which I believe He is about to restore to the church. Please consider the story of Uzzah, who reached out his hand and touched the ark to steady it and died (1 Chron 13:9-10) and the story of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to Peter, but according to scripture, they lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-4) and died.

Praise be to God, who reveals truth to the hearts of men! Let us be built up into the fullness of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour! And may His church be fully returned and restored unto Him. Amen!

Notes:

1. www.gotQuestions.org "Is the distinction between clergy and laity biblical?"

2. www.EarlyChristianWritings.com
Ignatius to the Magnesians, Ch. 6 & 7
3. www.EarlyChristianWritings.com
Ignatius to the Smyrneans, Ch. 8 & 9
4. There is compelling evidence to support the claim that these writings may have been penned much later (circa 250 AD).
www.bible.ca
The 15 forged letters of Ignatius
5. In 1 Peter 5, the people are exhorted to submit to the elders, but then also that all (including the elders) would submit one to another in love.
Who are the elders? I would like to submit that elders are those who love God above their own lives and on whom rests the authority of God for the good of those they serve and love in the Lord (not appointed by men, but recognized by men as appointed and anointed by God; true disciples of Christ Jesus). They are those who have died to self-interests and live only to serve the Lord's interests, inspiring and motivating others by their example to give up all and follow the Lord at all costs.