

New Testament

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**THE ORIGINAL
CHURCH
TO
COME**



TREVOR MADDISON

The Original Church to Come

Model, Vision & Values



Trevor Maddison

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Synopsis

Explores the original principles of the New Testament church after the Spirit fell, offering the way forward for the Christian church to come as it returns to its original model, vision, and values. This short book draws partly on a significant work of the author and missionary Alexander Rattray Hay in South America, and his book *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary* (1947). An old-fashioned title but an advanced and prophetic message pointing the way to the future. His work was based on the experience of taking the gospel to the mission field and discovering that though the gospel was powerful, the western forms of church were a total flop. He therefore returned to the Bible to discover the true principles of the original church and then put this into practice to discover it was powerful and vibrant. The church in Argentina where he was working has since seen revival on an unprecedented scale, leading us to stop and examine that key work and what it may hold for the church in our day. Expect to be challenged as this focuses on what the church was originally, and should still be. And be ready for all your modern concepts of church to be questioned in the light of this proven model.

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Forward

This book has gone through a number of iterations. Some of them were pre-book; more as pamphlets than a book in the early stages. In each case I believe I followed the lead of the Spirit to write each stage.

One thing that encouraged me greatly was that after writing a stage God sent some strong confirmations, showing me I was on the right track. Then when it finally came to writing the first revision of the book, afterwards I was given the strongest confirmation I have ever received on anything.

On an early stage, about 2008, I wrote a pamphlet that was verging towards the first book. But this for me was a pre-stage for beginning to write; I had not yet been called to become a writer of books.

Previous to this, my theatre of ministry had been in or with churches, both in the buildings and, once I discovered the real power of God to heal, I took it out on the streets to evangelise, as of course Jesus and the apostles did. This led to me and many fellow Christians experiencing God's power like this, often for the first time for them.

In 2008, when I had finished writing the pre-book, I saw a notification from a local

intercessors group and felt a nudge of the Spirit to attend. But when the time came for the meeting I had forgotten about it, and when I remembered I realised I had other arrangements that clashed, so I didn't attend. However, sometimes when you get a nudge like that, if you miss it there can be a real sense of regret from the Holy Spirit (a grieving) – like you missed something important, and this was how it was for me.

Then, about a month later, I saw a notification for the next intercessors meeting of the same group, but this time instead of the meeting being held across the other side of the city, as it was before, this time (unusually) it was held in a church, which happened to be the nearest church in the city to where I was living – just a short walk away.

By this time I had realised this was important to God, and therefore should be important to me – so I attended.

When I entered the church a number of people were there, including a few worship leaders. I then got another strong prompt from the Spirit go and ask one specific worship leader a key question – a question the Spirit also gave me.

The question was – What is God saying to all of you at this time?

This seemed to take this leader aback as I don't think he was expecting it. He thought for a

moment, because I think he too was sensing this was important, and then he said – Two things:

First, God is drawing us into a deeper intimacy with him. And Second, that the kind of church God is leading us to will not be like this – at which point he pointed to the rows of pews and general layout and structure of the church, with its programmes.

Then I asked, what does that kind of church look like, and he said – We don't know yet; we just know it will not be like this.

That was God giving me a timely confirmation that I was on the right track in what I had just written.

What happened next for me in 2010 was that God called me to write my first book – entitled '*God's Plan for the Ages*' which was basically a download of my faith as I had arrived at it over more than three decades. This book was written in the common language, without much use of big theological words, and it was intended to be strong meat – the strongest possible. And, as always where something prophetic is coming forth, it contained the new as well as the old, so for me it contained sections that were new to me, that deepened my faith considerably, and these things have stayed with me ever since as riches of wisdom and knowledge that I value greatly.

However, God's purpose it always manifold, and this calling into writing was also God's way of getting me the writing practice I needed for further books – most particularly this one.

Later in 2018, when I was led by the Spirit to first write this book, I did it, and then I said to God – How will you authenticate this book?

I guess I had been so blessed and encouraged by the confirmation I received on the earlier pre-book iteration that I was hoping for more.

This time, as is usual with God, I got a different response, which was that he gave me yet another book to write. A book called '*The 2020 Vision of the End Times*' where I brought a key prophetic word about the 'upheaval' that was coming to the world in the year 2020, together with an exposition on my understanding of key points of end-times teaching, as I had received it over the years.

That book was released in June 2019, and some laughed and scoffed at it a little, but of course we are now on the hindsight side of history on this where 2020 was infamous for a worldwide pandemic, with all the hysteria that came with it, where even the churches were shut down for a time.

Then of course we moved into the 2020's decade, which, beyond the pandemic, proceeded with wars that had the potential to go global, and nuclear, and that kind of upheaval has not yet abated, as prophesied in the book.

Of course, God didn't do (or allow) all that for my benefit – to authenticate my book, but it was all coming anyway and he simply utilised it to give me the strongest confirmation of anything I have ever had in my life. So, for that reason, along with my inner convictions, the message of this book has been authenticated by the Spirit of God in the strongest possible terms, so I emphatically stand by its message.

That gives you a bit of the history of this book. Of course the other part of it is my long experience (and dissatisfaction) with church, which inevitably comes through here. But that too I believe is something I get from the Spirit – I believe he too is dissatisfied with church as it now generally is – even if he puts up with it (that's just the God he is).

Will it always be this way? Well, the title of this book should give away my answer to that question – an emphatic NO. There is yet to be a move of God that restores the kind of church that changed the world in the early centuries.

This pretty much gets you up to date on where this book is now – except for one thing: Sometime after writing the book God said to me clearly – This is still only a draft. Initially from that I assumed I was yet to be led to write another iteration, but what he has made clear to me is that this book will always be a draft no matter how many iterations it goes through. Why? Because what remains will only be learned by doing it, and of course by following the lead of the Spirit in doing it, and that I think will be a long learning curve.

The problem with a book like this is that some will always come along and try to turn it into law. It will then become another enshrined idea that misses the dynamic of the Spirit, which will be as dead as some of the churches we now have – because ‘the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life’.

So the activity of the Spirit is the key thing in something like this, hence God is only giving a draft and is saying – If you want the rest then just follow me.

Therefore the book is designed only to get us started on this new path, and I am sure it will do for us exactly that, if we receive it in the way it is intended.

Of course it still remains quite possible that I will be led to update the book, as I am with these hindsight comments, but God is the author of our faith and the builder of the true church, so we can continue to expect surprises as we stay in step with the Spirit in all things.

This is how it always is with God and a life led by the Spirit, so I look forward to walking out this journey with you, and seeing what God's true plan really is as it emerges, which is always better than anything we could come up with by ourselves.

Introduction

There are numerous books written about church, its structure, body ministry and gifts of the Spirit. We may well ask – Do we need another one?

A few decades ago, I was training to be an engineering manager in a huge national industry in Britain – coal mining. All this industry has now closed in Britain, but back then it was so large and complex they put their training managers through rigorous training exercises to develop their management skills. The idea was that if we are destined to make mistakes, which we all inevitably were, it would be better for us to make them in the training environment rather than out there in the field. As a great deal of management focuses on the skills to communicate with people and lead them to cooperate to achieve a goal, many of these exercises were designed to test and develop those skills.

One exercise that I remember well divided the delegates into groups for a debating experience. The groups were all given the same real-world scenario and told to debate their solution. They were then told to choose delegates to represent their group for the next round where each group was pitched against another and told to negotiate on their decisions to come to a common

agreement on how to proceed. This would go on until the groups were reduced to just two, and the final debate would take place in front of all those of us that were not chosen, and in front of cameras with a view to analysing it afterwards. All these debates were conducted with a silent observer from the training facility whose observations would become part of the analysis.

The scenario we were given was of an aeroplane crash landing in the desert with us on board. The plane caught fire and we were able to escape but were only able to rescue just a few items from a list we were given to help us come through the challenge of surviving the desert. We were told of a camp some 70 miles away, and that our radio was destroyed in the crash, so we were unable to simply radio for help. This was in the days before mobile phones where such a situation would be serious and life threatening.

The group debates raged on, gradually coming to agreement on the items that should be rescued, until it came down to the final filmed debate in which I would not participate but would be one of the many observers.

What the delegates found on each side of this debate was that the items they selected to help them survive were completely different, so

there was clearly some work to be done before they could agree.

In front of most of the remaining delegates, this debate hit total deadlock. They simply could not agree on what items to keep and what to let go. Eventually the allocated time to reach an agreement ran out with no resolution.

Why did it break down?

Why were their ideas so different?

Nobody seemed to even ask this last and most basic question. The reason for the difference was because on one side the group had decided to escape the desert situation by walking across the desert. The other had decided to stay put near the crash site and wait for help. In short, their fundamentals were different. But this difference was never discussed. Yes, they both sought to survive, so they shared a goal. But they differed on the basic and most fundamental decision on what was the way forward in their quest for survival.

So, to come back to our question on church – Why do we need another book? The answer is because pretty much all books out there on church assume we must move forward on the common and long-established fundamentals of modern church, many of which exist across the board at the most

fundamental level. However, this book challenges that very notion and takes us way back beyond the basics that are almost always assumed by all current books.

What it offers is a clear distinction between modern church and the original New Testament church. And so it returns to the original fundamentals of the way church operated in the early church, and the way it is shown to be in the scriptures. In this original church many of the same elements exist as with modern church, but the structure and order of church is very different.

Is it really possible that church has been doing all this wrong for what is now millennia? Well, it is probably best, before you continue to read, to prepare yourself for that very idea. It's not that I am the first to propose it, as you will very soon see. But what I have done here is to fill in the gaps for what others have said about this whole subject.

Recently I was led to re-read a book from about 70 years ago called *'The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary'* by Alexander Rattray Hay. This book was put into my hands some years ago and it had a profound impact on me as I was asking many relevant questions of the church, as I knew it at the time, that were addressed in this book.

The book was published in 1947 and as such it has an old-fashioned title¹. But it is a book with a track record that still offers a truly forward-looking prophetic voice on the things that are yet to be recovered by the church.

Its basic premise is to show what the New Testament (NT) church, as seen in the book of Acts and the New Testament, was really like, and the principles on which it ran that were so dynamic that it impacted the world as it did.

The book is more than 500 pages, is founded entirely on scripture and is very thorough, so it takes some careful study.

The track record of the book comes from the fact that it was implemented in its time, and since then, on the mission field in South America, and particularly Argentina.

Originally the author of this book and his missionary organisation went into South America, preached the gospel, and established new churches with the traditional form and order of the modern western church. They found the gospel as powerful as ever, but the church experience was something else, having little power, life, or dynamism. As such it was unable to serve the spiritual needs of the natives of their mission field

¹ A modern equivalent title would be '*The New Testament Model for Church and Apostle*'

so the work either floundered or stumbled along. As a result, the missionaries returned to the New Testament and researched the original order of the early church. Then, having found some significant and radical surprises in the NT model, they implemented this model in the South American churches and had the very opposite experience – of a powerful and dynamic church which was deeply satisfying, and where people grow spiritually and mature rapidly in their faith, gifting and ministry.

Considering that now, in our present day, one of the real hot spots of revival in the world is South America, and particularly Argentina where powerful things are happening; I believe now, more than 70 years on, this is in some measure the direct result of the foundations that were laid down back then, which gives as much sanction to this book as we could ever expect any book to have.

However, this is not to say that even in South America this order of church has been fully recovered, but it was re-prototyped and tested out there, which, together with the scriptures, is something we can build on.

When we look at the early church in the New Testament, it quickly becomes clear that their meeting environment was much different to what

is commonly known today in modern church. To emphasise the point, consider the following scriptures:

- *When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (1 Cor 14:26)*
- *Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged (1 Cor 14:29-31)*
- *But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you! (1 Cor 14:24-25)*
- *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God (1 Peter 4:1)*

- *When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus is present... (1 Cor 5:4)*

Although parts of the modern church have implemented some of the lessons encapsulated here in some measure, there is still a very clear and significant difference between the general form and order of church, as it is still done, and the true New Testament order found in the scriptures.

What is clear from the scriptures, and the book mentioned earlier, is that the true church order has a level of freedom and dynamism that even today is still a rarity in the modern church.

When structuring church in line with the NT model there are some very important details that have a profound effect on the overall order and outcome, including the fact that it even redefines the very role of a 'leader'.

This document is not intended to be a replacement for the book referred to above, but it seeks to present the model, vision and values of the book, and the New Testament, in a concise form without necessarily giving all the proofs from scripture. These can be obtained directly from the book. But here we do seek to complete the model, based on experience and research of the scriptures, by taking it right down to the essential

pragmatic details of the true and original *modus operandi* of NT church.

When it comes to this NT model it is important that all the principles are implemented together and that parts of the model are not implemented piecemeal. The reason is, they work organically together as a whole and it will soon break down if all elements are not present and working.

If we are going to re-implement this kind of church in our day, it will be essential to understand and appreciate these details.

The principles outlined here define the *order* – meaning the structure and mode of operation of church (the way it functions), as seen in the NT. The central focus of this is the structure and mode of operation of the church gathering, or meeting.

Clearly, whilst meetings are by no means the ‘be all and end all’ of church, the meeting of the church as a body is a central key of church life and it is the thing that most needs reformation for the dynamism of NT church to be realised again.

This includes both large and small gatherings of believers, whether formal or informal, who come together in the Lord’s name for his purposes; although the structure outlined here does become more vital the bigger the group, and it is in these larger gatherings where it

is most necessary for that order to be rediscovered. That is where God intends the fullness of that dynamic to emerge.

As we move through this study, what we will realise is that many of the things that happen in modern charismatic church do have a place in the original NT model of church, so we are not simply looking to scrap the whole thing, but often the modern church order, as we now know it, should really be seen as special events/meetings, and not the general order of church that should take priority over everything else.

Later one of the details we will discuss is what we mean here by 'larger', according to the NT model, but we are not referring to the modern-day mega-church meeting that may expand to thousands. The place of such large gatherings does come into the category of the 'special' event in the NT model, so it is something we will examine once the whole basic original NT church model is better understood.

The form of the meeting, and the principles on which it runs, are vitally important for the proper functioning of the body in their gatherings. To get it right is pivotal to all that goes on in church, affecting the overall structure and roles of all members. Equally, to get it wrong can lead to real dysfunction – something that many believers

are aware of in modern church today, despite its polished programmes, even if they don't have clear answers on how these problems should be resolved.

This document focuses on the correct principles, environment, roles, gifts, ministries, and order required for the church to meet and function as the original NT model of church demonstrates and intends.

As such it may challenge the traditions and status quo of many, if not most churches in the present day. However, the widespread dissatisfaction of many with modern church, and the often-recognised failure of the church to fulfil its commission, demand that we take a close and critical look at our practices to see how we have deviated from the path that God intends for us and the church.

The principles outlined here are drawn directly from the New Testament.

For this or any other model to function properly it is important that all members understand the model and are committed to maintain it and work within its guidelines and boundaries for it to work. If all agree on this, the church has a basis on which it can start to function. If there is no agreement, then the church

cannot function because *'How can two walk together unless they are agreed?'* (Amos 3:3). So, the priority is for members to come into agreement on the model if a church is to be formed on this basis.

The accepted model, whatever it is, defines the degree of freedom that the group, and the individuals within it, collectively accepts as right and proper, and will voluntarily adhere to.

Present day church functions under such a model, whether written or unwritten, and most that attend conform to its demands. However, that does not mean those modern values and principles are right, or as God wants or intends.

On these grounds we therefore appeal to all to consider the NT principles covered here in the light of scripture and allow a healthy review of our practices so we can be sure we are operating in the way God intends for us, knowing that regardless of what we are presently familiar and comfortable with, his way is best!

The key principle that underpins this original NT model of church is that all members have the opportunity to be active in the meetings at all times, and are constantly encouraged to utilise that opportunity in appropriate ways.

At present what we have is almost the diametrical opposite to this, where the meeting is dominated by a programme, and either the whole or the majority of the meeting is given over to pre-defined activities by those permitted to perform them. Some even script the meetings down to the last detail.

I was once dumbfounded to hear the ideas of a church advisor in one church that had a programme that was polished down to the fine detail. He advised that the leaders factor in a few mistakes to their service so it seemed more authentic.

In his mind this was the way forward for church; to try to disguise the reality of what was going on to those that pointed out to him that their church was nothing more than a programmed act.

Others would deny that this is what is really happening, claiming to have a greater level of freedom. But in truth, though not admitted, the programme is often padded out to fill the allotted time, so no opportunity is left for unexpected and unscheduled interjections, except perhaps sometimes by those permitted to give them, or within a very controlled and programmed slot.

At times, in these modern churches, the people do force an interjection with something they want to bring to the church, based on their belief that this is acceptable, but the response of the leaders is frosty, or unfirming, thereby enforcing the programmatic order using social pressure, and it certainly does not welcome the deviation from the programme with any genuine warmth.

Where the heart of the leader is inclined towards the current model of church, for whatever reason, they then often respond by adjusting the programme so that these deviations can't happen easily, and so the programmatic format that restricts the activity of members gets even more entrenched.

Why would a church leader do this?

That is something we will discuss further as we become familiar with the original NT model of church and examine how the modern church came to deviate from that model.

What we need to realise, by comparing modern church with the original model, is that what we have today is really pseudo-church as it lacks the basic freedom that should actually define church. For many modern leaders, the kind of freedom I am proposing here would be their worst nightmare, but it is probably better at this point to suspend judgement until the whole NT model is

understood as it includes all that is needed to avoid the inevitable problems of simply trying to introduce such freedom into the modern church order.

At this point many Christian churchgoers will be having all manner of reactions to the suggestion that their order of church is not what it should be. Books have been written about how fiercely some will defend the finest minutia of detail in their church order. Some of these books are tragedies, and others are pure comedy – like the worship leader that tried to move the piano to the other side of the church by shifting it a few inches every week, knowing that a bold action of moving it in one go would inflame huge resistance.

For myself I see such resistance as grounded in something more sinister as there is real opposition out there to anything that will really advance the Kingdom of God in this world. The truth is, the church has deviated from the original model, and this has been going on for a very long time.

As we rediscover the original model of church, we really should seriously consider re-categorising and renaming what we now call church. Following the Greek/Latin language tradition, we should

perhaps seek to name things as exactly what they are – so it does what it says on the tin/can.

Our current forms of church should therefore probably be named a '*Christian Service Station*', or an '*Apostolic Resource Centre*' or something like that, but not '*church*' as that is a word that comes from the scriptures, and it refers to something very different.

We will begin to explain this very soon, but the truth is, though this modern-day kind of meeting has spiritual benefits, and Christ will be present as he promised wherever people gather in his name, still it lacks the true freedom for the Spirit to move as he desires that defines what NT church really is. The measure of freedom we give him he will use. But for him to have the full measure of freedom that NT church is intended to have, the order of church must be set up in the same way that it was in the early church.

It is a shocking thought to realise that in all our time as a Christian we have never actually been to a real church meeting as the apostles originally had it, but just something that has been labelled church. For many/most of us, that is the simple truth of the matter.

At this point some will no doubt be reiterating under their breath the old maxim that 'the church are the members'. This is true. The

whole body of believers out there are the Church (capital 'C') of Christ – the Bride of Christ, and this will always be true. But in the scriptures, church (lower case 'c') is also something that we do, and that is what we are talking about here; what we actually do when we meet; how the body functions when it meets together.

How important is that? – It is nothing short of vital if we are to see the kind of world changing dynamism that the early church was known for.

As we said, a *Christian Service Station* or *Apostolic Resource Centre* (modern church) does have value and the things it has to offer can help us grow in our faith to some degree. We will discuss this later, but the point we are making here is that it should not be confused with church, because church is something different that is of primary value and importance, and it is something that no service station or resource centre can ever possibly replace.

The Layout of this Document

This document is presented in several sequential sections:

The first section is the most concise statement of the [Principles of Original NT Church](#) without much explanation or elaboration. This consists of nineteen distinct principles, and they are accompanied by some key scripture references in the footnotes to identify some of their sources in the scriptures. It will raise many questions, but we resist the desire to explain things too much at this point as it is best to get a really concise idea of the NT model as a whole first before getting into the detail of any individual principle. The reason is because all these principles work together, and they are not complete unless they are all are present and in operation at the same time.

The [Notes On the Principle of Original NT Church](#) that follow in the second section go over the same ground again, but this time giving a more thorough explanation and elaboration of the principles. These notes are given principle by principle, so they exactly mirror the first section with notes for each principle, with the intention of expanding the understanding of each one.

The [Comments on the Principles of Original NT Church](#) that follow go over the same ground again but this time fill in the gaps for many of the details and questions that arise from the whole model and order of NT church. This should serve to answer many of the questions that arise from the principles. With this, examples are given of the format and mode of operation of the typical church meeting under the original NT model. We then look back and compare the original model of church with what happens in modern church in our day to realise how we have deviated from that original model.

Generally, the best way to read this document is to cover all of the first section first *with suspended judgement* to get the overview, including each principle concisely stated.

Then read the notes with reference back to the original principles.

And finally read the comments and the chapters that follow to fill the gaps and answer some key questions.

The Principles of Original New Testament Church

Church – Wherever two or three are gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus is church¹, and that is where these principles should apply. This applies emphatically to both small and larger group meetings that gather in his name, though it becomes more critical the larger the group, and it is the larger groups where the greater NT church dynamic is intended to operate. Here are the principles:

1. **Ruling** – Whoever rules does so as the youngest and as a servant of all². Ruling according to the true meaning of the scriptures means simply *to preside*, which is something that happens in meetings to keep order. The person who takes this role does not step up to a higher power level, but rather lowers themselves to become a servant, even laying down some of their normal equality and rights in the group, placing their own preferences last in order to serve the rest. They do this in order

¹ Matt 18:20 – For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

² Luke 22:26 – the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves

to provide others with the opportunity to contribute freely in gifts and ministries whilst they maintain order, keeping the meeting moving and flowing ([see note: N1](#)).

2. **Equality** – There is no single individual leader, other than the Lord Jesus who is the head. The goal is to do everything possible to allow him to truly operate as the head (i.e., directing and guiding the body). Those present all operate on an equal footing, though some may be given various roles for presiding and oversight, by agreement of the body, in order to serve the group ([see note: N2](#)).
3. **Acknowledging the presence** – The group should always recognise and acknowledge the real and actual presence of Christ with them as he promised. Corporate worship, prayer, preaching, teaching, the use of scripture and the gifts of the Spirit are foundational practices for the group meetings, but in everything the presence of Jesus with them by his Spirit, and his leading, is recognised throughout all the proceedings in a meeting ([see note: N3](#)).
4. **Freedom in the Spirit** – All believers that are present are free to contribute as they believe they are led and guided by the Holy Spirit to

do so³. All the gifts and ministries of the Spirit are welcome and can be used by all present.⁴ All have the opportunity to preach/speak, but as for everything that is said and done, it *must all be tested* and affirmed by all present to be according to the Spirit before what is said is accepted ([see note: N4](#)).

5. **Presiding** – The main task and role of the person who rules (i.e. presides) is to make sure all present have the necessary freedom and opportunity to share whatever they believe God is prompting them to say or contribute, and to ensure it is properly tested. As such the person who presides may have to limit or curtail some of the input if it restricts the freedom of the others to make their contributions. But in general, there is total freedom according to these principles ([see note: N5](#)).

6. **Holy Spirit Led** – All contributions must come from a direct leading from the Lord by the

³ 1 Cor 12:11 – All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

⁴ 1 Cor 14:31 – For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.

Acts 2:17 – I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy

Spirit of God⁵. Any person that makes a contribution must be able to make the claim that they believe the Lord is leading them to do so. Therefore, the purpose of the group is not to discuss their own opinions or ideas, but to speak only as they are prompted and led by the Spirit. This does not mean that there will not be discussion because the Spirit may lead the group into a discussion, but it means that anybody that contributes to the discussion must only seek to do so as they believe they are led to by the Spirit. Of course, discussion of personal opinions and ideas can take place outside of this setting, but that is not the main purpose here – it is purely to give God the lead and to seek to discover and share the mind of his Spirit on all things through the whole body working together (see note: N6).

7. ***Weighing & Testing*** – All contributions in meetings *must* be publicly weighed and tested by all present to discern whether or not what is shared is of the Lord, or to discover what parts of what is shared are from the Lord⁶. It is part

⁵ 1 Pet 4:11 – If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

⁶ 1 Cor 14:29 – Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.

of the job of the one who presides to make sure all have the freedom and opportunity to engage in the testing of what is offered ([see note: N7](#)).

8. **Unanimity** – Nothing can be accepted as from the Lord unless the whole group can unanimously affirm that it is from God. If God is saying it to one, then he will be confirming it to all that have his Spirit. I reiterate – only when every member can affirm that it is from the Lord can a word be accepted and acted upon by the church.

9. **Resolving God's Will & Purpose** – Where the church is unable to come to unanimous agreement that a word or contribution that has been given is from God, they must commit the matter to prayer and fasting, and raise the matter again, as appropriate, at a later date – as led by the Spirit, to ascertain whether they have managed to reach unity on whether or not this is the mind of the Lord on the matter in question. Those that believe it is of God must always be free to raise it again as he leads them.

1 Thes 5:19-22 – Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

10. **Sharing roles** – The job of presiding should normally be taken by more than one individual in the body at different meetings so that the God given gifts for the role in different individuals can be recognised and identified by all in the group, and so that any that preside may also have the opportunity to contribute on an equal footing with all the others.
11. **Interjection** – Whenever a person is speaking, he/she must be ready to 'give way' to any that choose to interject, believing that it is important for them to make an immediate contribution⁷. The one presiding must seek to keep order, and the one who interjects should respect the need for order through the role of the presider, but the freedom for interjection at any time must always be given and accepted by all⁸. As always, any interjection should always be in response to the direct promptings and guidance of the Lord. The first speaker may then continue after the interjection, if they so wish, and are led to do so ([see note: N11](#)).

⁷ 1 Cor 14:30 – And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

⁸ 1 Cor 14:39-40 – Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

12. **Visiting believers** – The group must always remain open to outside believers to come in and contribute on the same footing as the rest as a member of the one true church. This includes believers who are unknown to the group. As for all, the visitor must be able to affirm that their contribution is made according to what they believe is the mind of the Lord. Their contribution must be diligently subjected to the same process of testing, as for everybody else, and only accepted if the mind of the Lord is unanimously discerned by all. If the group cannot find unanimity they must commit the matter to prayer and fasting, as for all such matters, and thereby seek to come into unity on it before it is accepted or acted upon ([see note: N12](#)).

13. **Messengers** – The group must always remain open to visits from believers who are sent to the group with messages and contributions from the Lord. These are people who claim to have come to the group with a specific word, message or contribution from God for the group. These messages must be treated seriously, but diligently tested by the group to ensure anything they bring is in fact from the Lord and can be unanimously affirmed as such

by the whole body. No sent ministry coming to the church should be paid for their services ([see note: N13](#)).

14. **Special Ministries** – The group should seek to establish ongoing relationships with those who come to them from the Lord with specialised ministries and sent messages that prove accurate. These people and their ministries should be valued by the group, received whenever they choose to come to the meetings, and called upon by the group as they have need of their services. They are the recognised apostolic ministries God has given to the group ([see note: N14](#)).

15. **Evangelism** – The group must always remain open for unbelievers to come in⁹ but if they seek to contribute then although they should be heard, as with anybody else, the one who presides must make sure that their contribution is not treated with the same authority and that the demand that all speak

⁹ 1 Cor 14:24-26 – But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand[a]comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!"

only as guided by God should be carefully and compassionately explained to that person (usually in private), along with the gospel and the opportunity given to receive salvation ([see note: N15](#)).

16. **Business** – All business decisions affecting the church/group are made in the meetings. There are no separate business meetings. All affairs are affairs of the whole church/group, and all are involved in the decision making process which consists wholly of discerning the mind of the Lord. Where individuals believe they hear the mind of the Lord on an issue, even if they discuss/share it outside of the church beforehand, they must bring it to the church to hear God affirm and accept it through the whole body ([see note: N16](#)).
17. **Prayer & Fasting** – Prayer is communication with God. As such it must be an ongoing practice for both the body and individuals to fast and pray as the main means by which they hear the voice of the Lord, find direction, and petition God according to his will. Prayer would happen both individually and corporately whenever they meet. Fasting serves to clarify the voice of God by diminishing the voice of the old nature. Fasting would be encouraged

wherever there are differences or a lack of clarity on what God was saying to the body or the members ([see note: N17](#)).

18. **Communion** – Communion is a regular practice of NT church and should be practiced with a frequency that is agreed by the body, under the direction of the Spirit, in order to meet the spiritual needs of the body and worship the Lord in this way, as Jesus instructed. Any may preside and serve if agreed by the whole group.
19. **Baptism** – Baptism is a practice of NT church and the main means for members to profess themselves as believers, and therefore given full freedom and opportunity for participation within the church meetings.

NOTES – On the Principles of Original NT Church

N1 Ruling – To rule is to preside. Later we give a full description of what it means to preside, but similar examples of the role of presiding in other settings could be:

- a) *The Speaker of the House in the British House of Commons* – Or the speaker of the USA House of Representatives, or the speaker in the the political chambers of other countries like this can also apply. Of course, the church meeting setting must never divide or organise into parties like these political chambers, but the environment must have the same kind of liberty for interjection and response. The job of the speaker is to see that all have the freedom and opportunity to contribute without disrupting the progress of the meeting excessively. The speaker of the house himself lays down his right to represent his views like the other members, including his party affiliations, in order to fulfil the role. His main demand and objective are that order is preserved whilst keeping the proceedings moving. The church also differs from this political setting in that all are expected to

speak as the Holy Spirit guides, prompts and reveals, and never to share what are merely their own opinions. They also never resolve issues by split vote, but always by seeking unanimity in the whole body on the mind of God. In fact, the British parliamentary environment was originally established on the principles of scripture.

- b) *The British TV Political Debate Programme 'Question Time'* – here is another good example of a similar role of presiding (or chairing) in the person chairing the panel for the purpose of political debate. The chairman does not generally or primarily represent his own opinions but seeks to get clarity on the views of others by giving them the opportunity they need to represent themselves, and then dealing with any grey areas in their arguments until clarity is achieved. Again, in the church it is not the opinions of individuals that is sought, but the singular mind of the Lord discerned by all present.

N2 Equality – There is a ministry gift of leadership where some direction is proposed as God's direction, but as for all ministries the gift is not imposed but offered as a service to the body from the position of a servant to the others. Such gifts

rely on hearing the voice of God accurately and submitting these directions to the body so they can all test its authenticity as a word from God. As such Jesus is allowed to lead as the head of the body, and his sheep follow him as they together recognise his voice. Although not all will receive directional words from God, yet all who have his Spirit will be able to recognise an authentic word from the Lord when it is shared with them. The one who receives such words is exercising a gift of leadership; however, the followers always follow voluntarily based on their acknowledgement and faith that it is the direction of the Lord. Without this they have no obligation to do so, and the one who leads in this way must work within these constraints.

The New Testament scriptures have no reference to a single individual church leader – which is something we would definitely expect to see there if it existed. Apostles and evangelists travelled in groups of two or more, and planted churches. The church then typically functioned under them without any assigned role for two or three years, upon which a plurality of elders and deacons were established and appointed based on the recognised character and gifting that had emerged, and according to the guidance of the Lord. There was never a single elder or deacon.

The church would begin with the apostles and evangelists modelling the NT structure to the body and giving opportunity to others to preside until the church became clear on who God was gifting and calling to the presiding role. There should always be more than one able to preside, and actively presiding in a church. The apostles and evangelists would then move on and leave them to continue to operate under the same model.

The single leader model is a worldly modification to the NT church structure that began to emerge in the 2nd century and was consolidated as the norm under the Roman emperor Constantine when the world invaded the church in a significant way, bringing its principles with it.

The single leader model can be paralleled to the OT era of Kings compared to the era of Judges. The monarchical system sometimes did well if the King was of noble character, but in the OT a very high percentage of Kings failed in their commission. Equally many modern churches run into real difficulties with this model. However, in the era of Judges – where God led directly through individuals he chose and gifted – though the nation of Israel still got off track at times, as the early church did, the means for correcting it was intrinsic to the system and God was able to bring

correction and realignment through it by raising up and using others to do the work.

Once the single leader model was accepted in the church, this led to hierarchies and a division of priesthood and laity, rather than the original priesthood of all believers where no such distinction existed. This gave rise to groups like the Nicolaitans – meaning ‘Victory over the common people’ – which is something that we are told in the book of Revelation, the Lord *hates* (Rev 2:6).

Let’s stop for a moment and consider this; Jesus, our Lord, makes it clear there are some things he hates. We can infer from his actions one of these was the abuse of the temple, turning the house of God into a marketplace. He said to the woman at the well that one day soon people would no longer worship there, at the temple, but would worship him in Spirit and in truth, inferring that this change would happen everywhere. Another place Jesus expressed hatred of something is with the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. His words about it were singeing, and he later warned the disciples to beware of their teaching. But the one to top all this is what he said directly to the Ephesus church in the book of Revelation, quoted above. It is ironic that some who look at every nuance of a Greek word in scripture to derive meaning from it, are not willing to face this; that

the name and teaching of this group, the Nicolaitans, says what it is/does on the tin/can. They taught an idea and structure where some consider themselves superior to others in the church and on that basis presume to rule them. It is a stark warning to us that though Jesus loves all of those who are his sheep, he nevertheless may hate our structure if it does not stick to the servant-model he gave us. Which means he may well hate our church structure if that is what it has become.

Some leaders today wonder why God does not seem to give more sanction to their church through signs and wonders, or other forms of affirmation. This is the reason; the church has departed from its original order and in doing so has ceased to properly represent him. For those leaders that are unaware of this deviation, it is worth pointing out that the kind of affirmation they desire, sometimes deeply, really is available under the true original NT model of church, as it was for the early church, where it puts Christ back in his place as the head of the body.

In the Old Testament God did not abandon the Kings, though they operated on a model that was against his counsel. However, many of the Kings abandoned him as they succumbed to the temptations of the role. Even where God was

invited to select the King they still often went astray – even the wisest.

This stands as a warning of the weakness of this structure, and it explains many of the problems that exist in the modern church where we have come to operate on a 'king' model, rather than a 'servant' model.

N3 [Acknowledging the presence](#) – The presence of the Lord Jesus is acknowledged in gatherings of church from start to finish, and he is given the lead throughout. Prayer is frequent as matters that are raised through contributions are committed to God as they arise. Prayer should always be done as speaking directly to the Lord, though not by detaching from the rest of the group. In the church it is a shared thing where others can give their Amen. There is no NT precedent for prayer with eyes closed and kneeling. Rather, the typical stance is eyes open and raised above the group, and possibly hands raised to indicate the Lord is being addressed directly. All who pray must speak directly to Jesus by faith as they would for any other person present.

N4 [Freedom of the Spirit](#) – All are given full freedom to contribute in meetings in any of the many possible ways ([see later](#)), according to these principles. This means that all that is said and done

must be as guided and revealed by the Spirit, and the rest must test and validate everything to be such before it is accepted. The opportunity to speak, or prophecy, should therefore be available to all. Undoubtedly the God given gifts for the ministry of preaching and teaching would emerge in the body over time and these gifts would then be given greater time and opportunity to function, but never in forced exclusion of others that believe they have something from God to deliver to the body. There is no demand for eloquence or even ability – only that God’s voice is recognised. The person presiding is there to help with this and should seek to draw clarity on the message from all that contribute in this way.

N5 [Presiding](#) – The role of presiding is a major key role to the operation of the church and is therefore covered in [more detail in a later section](#).

N6 [Holy Spirit Led](#) – Contributions may be either in the form of spontaneous prophecy, or prepared preaching/teaching which may be prearranged by agreement with the whole church through the one presiding in a previous meeting. Generally, where people have something lengthier to give, they will ask the presider in the main meeting, in front of the whole body, for time and opportunity to deliver it. If practicalities or guidance prevent the

immediate delivery then the one presiding will agree to arrange an opportunity at the next meeting, or an agreed following meeting – providing there is agreement from the body to hear it.

Normally any request to deliver such a message should be permitted and taken and treated seriously. However, those presiding must be careful not to allow any contribution to hinder the other contributions members want to make. It may therefore be necessary to agree on the time/length of any message with the contributor.

Such messages are still subject to the same rights for interjection. By allocating time limits (e.g., say 5 minutes) a number of these lengthier preached messages can be delivered in one meeting, however there should always be room for the dynamic and spontaneous contributions such as prophecies and words.

At times, of course, some matters require more time for more substantial treatment than this if it is something of great significance to the body. But it is best to get the shorter form first in order to prioritise it and to get a chance to listen to God on what he is saying about it. If that initial testing suggests it is something important, then the appropriate time should be allocated, when convenient.

This practice of applying for time to deliver something substantial to the body is a far better way to operate than in the modern church where a speaker is invited to fill a regular gap and therefore must come up with something. In this way extended time is only given when someone definitely claims to have something from the Lord to give, and not simply because it is in the programme. We therefore never put pressure on anyone to fill a slot in NT church; it is not necessary.

Often, in the modern church, these programmed preached messages end up full of anecdotes and other things in order to pad them out to fill the programmed time slot. In the original NT model, only the time needed for the delivery needs to be allocated as others will be waiting in the wings to bring their contributions to the body. That said, there is room for anecdotes too if that is what people have to give, but the point is it is not included merely as padding and they should always seek to be delivering what God has given them without making it of such a length that it excludes other members from also giving.

We should always be open for God to use all kinds of creativity in these deliveries, according to the gifts people have, and never to prescribe how God communicates with us. As such the meetings should be quite colourful as it remains

open to the variety of ways people use to express themselves. After all we have a tremendously creative God.

The scripture 1 Cor 14:29 has been used to suggest that only two or three prophecies can be given at any given meeting. However, this contradicts the scripture that goes on to say you all may prophesy (1 Cor 14:31). The reason is because the instruction that two or three prophecies can be given is only that they should then be tested before the meeting moves on so they are not lost by the quantity of contributions. Once tested there is freedom for two or three more to speak, and then test again. In this way a whole meeting can be run on this basis, using the gift of prophecy, but the whole church must remain focussed to test and admit only what they can positively affirm to be the Lord speaking. The one presiding needs the gifts and wisdom of God to preside in a way that maintains clarity and quality, being mindful of the needs and limits of those present (i.e., energy, concentration etc.). This means timeouts from these proceedings may be needed, or perhaps breaks to worship in song. It is the job of the presider to manage all this.

When the church gathers, we would always hope to have some time where members are able to have some casual fellowship and maybe take some refreshment together. The point is, the

church environment must be kept as relaxed as possible, like a family gathering, which is what it is. A little experience of this freedom will soon lead the members to learn how to maintain the unity of the Spirit, which is something all should be concerned with whilst maintaining a commitment to always be truthful and available to the Spirit.

N7 [Weighing & Testing](#) – One major reason many in the modern church have become averse to the use of prophecy is because the necessary testing is not implemented before it is accepted. In turn the testing can only really be implemented if there is one presiding in the proper way to ensure that this is done. The freedom and dynamism of the original NT church model can only therefore properly work if it is implemented wholesale and not piecemeal, with all elements in place and functioning.

N11 [Interjection](#) – An interjection from someone may, for example, contribute to what is being said, or may go off at a tangent if the member who brings it believes this is what the Lord is prompting for. It is up to the presider to handle this and decide if it is a Spirit led direction. Others can comment or affirm this if they feel they should. In the end the presider must decide, and all must accept his decision, but the freedom for

interjection must be constantly maintained and clarified to the church; that they have this freedom. With this the responsibility of all to seek to speak and act according to nothing but what the Lord is giving them to contribute, must be constantly but carefully emphasised by the presider. The performance of the presider will always be under the watchful eye of the elders, and it will be subject to their review outside of the church meetings.

N12 [Visiting believers](#) – The original NT model of church would always maintain an openness to outside believers coming in and contributing on an equal footing to the rest. This may seem radical, and it would be for modern church, but the practice of functioning under the watchful oversight of leaders, and the constant weighing and testing by the whole body for anything given, would provide the safety net needed to make this possible, and safe. At times this would of course lead to false believers or messengers coming in amongst them claiming to have words from God which are really their own, but the safeguard is in the experienced ability of the body to recognise the voice of the Lord in the testing of all that is contributed. On the other hand, where true believers come in and contribute genuine words from God, this crossflow of churches would often

be highly stimulating and would form great relationships between churches. As such, though this openness brought many challenges to the church, it ultimately strengthened them by developing and affirming their ability to hear and discern the voice of the Lord and opening them to receive from others from other churches, so they do not become an isolated part of the larger body of the church. We will say more on this later.

N13 [Messengers](#) – All original NT churches were served by believers with ‘sent’ ministries of apostles and evangelists. God would send these people to them for long or short seasons to stimulate new growth and/or correct problems that arose. This was and is God’s mechanism for resolving problems in NT churches and stimulating new growth that is beyond their present level of experience. All groups should recognise these ministries and be served by them. Every group should seek to form ongoing relationships with such people as a means to maintaining spiritual growth and health. The group must always remain entirely open to believers coming in with contributions they claim to be from the Lord, but their contributions must be rigorously tested and affirmed by all before they are accepted. In the Ephesians’ church, false apostles came to them that Christ commended them for recognising and

identifying as such (Rev 2:2). Sent messengers coming to the church should never be paid by the church to whom they travel. They must live by faith expecting God to meet their need and be willing and ready to work if God directs them to do this. They may have outside support, maybe from those who sent them out, and that is ok, but this rule prevents the false messengers from masquerading in pursuit of financial gain from the people to which they come.

N14 [Special ministries](#) – All groups should actively seek to be served by special sent ministries that will come to them as God guides them, with whatever contribution he sends them. The group should therefore always be open to new ministries of this kind coming to them, but also to establish ongoing relationships with recognised ministries that can serve them in this way. In meetings, these ministries must serve the group on an equal footing with the rest, but the group should be ready to give due consideration to anything that such people bring to them, especially considering that often the very purpose of these ministries is to push the group on to new things, or to resolve conflicts or other problems in the church. The church, or any member of it, may at any time send for help from these recognised ministries, seeking their service, but should not give them a position

of superiority, or of individual leader, or allow them to operate above the normal procedures of testing and approving all things in the way that the church does for itself. Often these special ministries operate in groups of two or more, and not generally individually. This provides additional accountability between them so they should also be operating on these principles of church between themselves.

N15 [Evangelism](#) – The meeting environment provides any unbeliever with a dynamic experience of God which is able to bring them to believe for themselves, so the normal church experience has a built-in evangelistic dynamic.

The problem of unbelievers coming in and contributing may be alleviated to some degree by the one presiding frequently and carefully explaining and affirming to the whole group that the purpose of the group is that each one present should be seeking only to speak from what they discern the Spirit of God within them is saying, and not some wisdom or thought that is purely their own. In any case, if an unbeliever wants to say something, all should be done to hear and accommodate it, but it must be tested in the same way as the rest of the contributions. We should never discount the idea that God can even speak to us through an unbeliever.

N16 [Business](#) – All are able to discern the mind of the Lord, and each must have their individual conviction and faith on everything the church is doing through their unity in the Spirit with the rest of the church. In this way every member in the group will come to personally own everything that is received and decided by the church. It is essential therefore that there are no separate business meetings where things are decided by select sub-groups. The group meetings are the business meetings, and everything should be decided in the presence of the Lord who is amongst them as they meet, and who is speaking directly to every individual. The setting up of such groups would be a step towards secret government and hierarchies, which is not acceptable. This does not mean things cannot be discussed and worked through outside of the church. But the findings must be finally presented to the whole body to be considered and accepted by all, so no decisions are made apart from the whole church. The only exception to this would be where the whole body agrees to delegate a matter to an individual, or individuals, who are recognised to have some wisdom for handling it. This would remove the need for unnecessarily spending body time on trivia, but any member should equally have the right to bring any matter they are

concerned about back to the whole body at any time.

N17 [Prayer & Fasting](#) – Prayer must be an ongoing practice in the church, both for the individual member, and corporately in the body; both in the main meetings and at other times whenever and wherever members meet. Fasting is a means of desensitising to the voice of the old nature in order to hear the voice of the Spirit more clearly. As such, prayer and fasting are the main means whereby differences are resolved, and clarity is achieved on all matters of discerning God's voice and his will. Prayer and fasting are therefore a mainstay of the whole of NT church because so much of it is based on all members hearing directly from the Lord and finding agreement on that. It would be helpful to have teachers in the body to periodically teach the place and importance of prayer and fasting, as the Lord leads.

COMMENTS – On the Principles of Original NT Church

We have covered all the individual principles of original NT church. The following comments are intended to answer questions and fill gaps on how these principles work together to form the modus operandi of original NT church, particularly in meetings.

Headship – The NT model permits Christ to function in his rightful role as the head of the church, his body, through the work of his Spirit. As such he is the one that ultimately leads the body. He is the Chief Shepherd.

God's tolerance – God always seeks to correct the mistakes we make in both our individual lives, and in modelling church, by speaking to us and seeking to bring us into a place where we voluntarily submit to him and his counsel. Where men or churches refuse to do so, he does not impose himself, but they then learn through the natural consequences of their choices, and God must often step aside for this to happen. However, he does not abandon the individual or the church but, as for the Laodiceans, even when he is forced

outside, he graciously continues to stand at the door and knock, appealing for re-admission¹¹.

It is a remarkable thing that God only seeks to lead us by speaking to us, but beyond that he gives us freedom to make mistakes. On the level of church, it seems that history will show God never imposed his own order. He simply gave us the information we need to know about it, and to want it. What men have done with church since it was first modelled is far different to that, but God has continued patiently with us whilst constantly holding before us that true model in the scriptures, if we only choose to take notice. As with all mistakes, whether by individual or church, it often needs those that make them to realise the cost of it through the consequences of their choice before seeking something better. That, it seems, will be the legacy of the church when it rediscovers this true and original NT model and order.

Unity in hearing God – If the mind of the Lord is a genuine phenomenon, then all should have the capacity to discern it, and all should hear the same

¹¹ Rev 3:20 – Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

thing. The Spirit is not the author of confusion¹². Many are unaware of the actual degree of unity that exists in the discernment of his voice because the present models do not allow our spiritual senses to be thoroughly developed, tested, and shared so we can experience it – either individually or by comparison with others present.

Discerning God's voice – Many believers who have not yet developed to a point where they feel able to discover the message of the Lord directly through the gifts of the Spirit, are still nevertheless able to discern his voice when they hear it. Jesus said '*my sheep hear my voice and follow me*'¹³. The NT model demands that we put faith in this as a reality and trust it. In truth even new believers recognise his voice, though they are helped by the affirmation of the spiritually mature to protect them from their vulnerabilities. In the NT environment they are able to exercise and test their own ability to hear and discern the voice of the Lord, and to compare it to those with more experience. With this experience they should soon come to confidently recognise God's voice when

¹² 1 Cor 14:33 – For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints,

¹³ John 10:4 – My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

they hear it, and therefore learn to contribute to the group as the Lord leads them.

Maturity – When people become experienced in hearing and discerning the voice of the Lord, they soon grow up into spiritual maturity¹⁴. The NT model of church is the ideal setting for this to happen where even new believers are able to test their spiritual senses against those of mature believers. Even where mistakes are made, the learning continues and the experience is a valuable exercise in accurate discernment, dividing and weighing/testing¹⁵.

Evangelism – The NT church is vibrant and dynamic with the life of the Spirit. As such it is an ideal setting for unbelievers to find God through repentance and salvation, though we must seek to maintain an environment that they can relate to¹⁶. Many Christians would consider such an environment to be foreign to the unbeliever and inappropriate for discovering God. It certainly should be an experience of something that they

¹⁴ Heb 5:14 Eph 4:11-16

¹⁵ 1 Cor 14:29 1 Thes 5:20-22 1 John 4:21

¹⁶ 1 Cor 14:23 – So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?

cannot really encounter anywhere else, but in truth the modern church model has proved to be foreign, artificial and a failure. In actual fact, the freedom and dynamism of this environment is something that unbelievers are generally more able to relate to than the formality and inactivity they often think of as 'church'. Here they will encounter a dynamic of the reality of God that will be a revelation to them, and the prophetic word is able to touch them directly and personally in a way they could not experience anywhere else.

Safe environment – The true NT model will always respect the freedom of the individual to stay quiet if they so choose, and never to be made the focus of attention or put upon in any way. To break this code of conduct would be to push people to make mistakes and it would also unnerve the nervous inquirer – be they believer or unbeliever. New people should feel secure in our environment, and this is only guaranteed where we leave room for all to make their contributions freely and in the time and way that they choose. We should rely entirely on the prompting of the Spirit, while the one presiding should always maintain the opportunity for contributions and provide encouragement for new ones to contribute. At the same time, we should always encourage the whole body generally to be attentive to the Lord and to

be ready to take responsibility if he prompts them to step up and speak or contribute. A safe environment is important.

Testing – Some may argue that the testing of words is an unnerving prospect that would discourage those that are shy or nervous and would produce an environment that is unsafe. However, testing is not just essential, it is vital. But it only happens for an individual when they make a contribution to the body, which means those that wish to avoid it can do so by not contributing. In answer to this objection there are some mitigating factors if the whole thing is running the way it should:

- *First* – testing is an ongoing practice applied to all words and contributions, of which there will be many, so it would not seem like one person is being victimised in some way. Anyone who contributes should be primed to accept that this must always happen. It should soon become part of the accepted NT church culture. The presider should make it clear that all words will be tested and must be affirmed.
- *Second* – testing generally occurs after several words have been spoken in a single wave of the Spirit, so it does not necessarily focus on

one individual. The presider will recognise this wave and seek to implement testing before the next transition.

- *Third* – the focus is on discerning what God is saying, and not particularly on what he is not saying. That can simply be discarded. These mistakes are mostly identified simply by the lack of affirmation for them. Repeated mistakes may simply mean the believer needs a little more instruction, or more time to learn how to hear the Spirit and speak correctly.
- *Fourth* – most people in the body should be willing and hoping for new and young believers to come on stream to an active participation in the meetings, because this is a blessing to all. As such they are generally in a profoundly accepting and encouraging environment where, even when they make mistakes, there are people to encourage them on to try again.
- *Fifth* – God is able to give a stronger prompting to get new and nervous believers through the nerves of launching out in new ways. When they get it right, they will be sure, and it will bless them as what they deliverer blesses others. We must trust God to be the

caring parent he is, leading his children to step out for him as and when they are ready to do so.

- *Sixth* – testing is something that greatly enhances the dynamism of the NT church environment and its value as a learning experience in accurately hearing the voice of God. It may make some hesitate before they contribute, but that hesitation is a vital and helpful thing, acting as a check and balance to those that would otherwise contribute too readily. However, the promptings of the Spirit are often so strong with new believers that they have no doubt that it is God speaking; they just need the courage to jump. More mature and experienced believers tend to learn to operate from a more restful place that demands far less nervous energy – and thankfully is profoundly less wearing.
- *Seventh* – Those that preside should seek to put new ones at ease by assuring them that mistakes are often made, and it is not a problem under the NT model we are using. We all do it sometimes.
- *Eighth* – Where mistakes are made, the one presiding should be ready and able to

encourage any that need it to try again with all compassion and sensitivity, as led by the Spirit to do so. This is an important part of the essential gift of the one presiding.

- *Ninth* – Once the practice of testing is established it will become a normal and accepted feature of church. We are then able to transmit this as part of the NT church culture. It is only the fact that it is foreign to the modern church culture that raises any questions about it.

Developing gifts – The NT church environment allows the gifts and ministries of all to emerge and be recognised. This in turn will lead to rapid church expansion, as it did in the early church. Provided this model is used, the expansion is never a problem, though multiplication of churches must be done in God's time. Problems generally arise when people deviate from the true NT church model and then discover they have vulnerabilities which they then try to plug or fix using worldly solutions. In the end this will lead straight back to where the modern church finds itself, so it is important that we base church on the whole NT order so it will not degrade in this way.

Openness – Paul left the church, sometimes in tears, in the full knowledge that there would be significant challenges and problems for them. He knew that *'wolves would come in among them'*¹⁷ in the form of false apostles and teachers who would sometimes seek to dominate them. He still left because the Holy Spirit sent him away. The fact that there will be problems is never a reason to ignore what God is saying or where he is leading. This must continue to be the driving force of all that happens in the church. The church matures by testing and discerning truth from error. If we shut the doors in fear of every challenge that may come along, we prevent the church from maturing in this way. To do so is tantamount to capitulation and it will bring us straight back to the very same church model and mistakes that have led us away from NT church in the past.

Messengers – The sent ministries of apostles (apostle means sent messenger) and evangelists are vitally important to the church. God will direct these ministries to churches that are open to them from time to time, and all churches need a plurality of these ministries serving them. These ministries are used by God to meet their special

¹⁷ Acts 20:29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

growing needs, sometimes to bring correction and help churches get through when they run into trouble.

Trouble is not a real problem if these ministries are able to operate to correct it, as Paul did with many of the churches, such as the Corinthian church that he founded. It is therefore vital that the church maintains its openness to outsiders that come to them claiming to have a message for them from God. It is also obviously equally important that the discipline of testing is active and healthy so that when false apostles, or believers with erroneous ideas come in, they can be discerned and identified, and their message confidently discarded.

In Rev 2:2 Jesus commends the church of Ephesus for testing the message of those that claim to be apostles and finding them false – their message was not from God. This is a scripture that makes little sense for the modern church. First because someone coming into a modern church would not normally get access to speak. And secondly, if they did get to speak it would not be tested – and certainly not by the whole church. So having lost the practice of testing all things, openly and together, the access of messengers has become a 'dodgy' thing where naive people will be influenced and there will be no redress or protection.

However, in the early church they always remained open to outsiders, allowing them to contribute, but they openly tested everything. In this way the naïve among them would get the benefit of learning from leaders and others they trust when they hear how they assess what is given. It therefore works in the opposite way, even for the arrival of false messengers by finding them false, because it builds up and educates those that otherwise would not know better or would be too uncertain of themselves to say so. Also, in cutting out the possibility of messengers coming to them they would also cut out true messengers – true apostles – people that God has sent. The modern church is therefore profoundly impoverished in all of this; the people remain inactive; and the learning curve for the members is much slower.

The point here is that the original NT model of church is a safe environment because any person coming into it with something to share are publicly and openly tested by the whole body so new believers quickly benefit and learn from experienced members, and at the same time it does not cut out the possibility of God sending any messenger he chooses to the church. In fact, these messengers (the true ones) were generally sent by God to push them on to new things, and so if the church ever lost its dynamism or began to flounder, God would soon send somebody to it

that would stir it up, possibly in new ways they hadn't known before, provided they were open to receive them. Openness is therefore a key and important feature of original NT church.

As we said before, at times Paul left the church, being led elsewhere by the Spirit, knowing that 'wolves would come in amongst them' – false apostles. He still left, as directed, leaving them to God, but knowing that they had a structure that enabled them to deal with the challenge when it came, and in the end that it would be a growing experience for them because maturity comes by learning to discern good from evil, and this is greatly helped when we get to compare their discernment to that of others. Of course, in some cases the message would be a challenge and 'the jury would be out', as it were, for quite a while. But eventually, through the normal practice of seeking God in prayer and fasting on everything, the church would come to a unanimous decision on the message that was brought. If the church can't reach this unanimity, then the message can't be accepted, but there is always the possibility of calling back true apostolic people who serve the church to help them resolve the problem.

Why would false apostles come in the first place? Invariably to gain something for themselves. This may be finance, or power, or control, or attention, or something else that they

want. Paul spoke of false apostles and teachers that peddled their message for profit. For this reason, it is better not to attract such people with the offer of financial reward, but to always let the sending/originating church of these people finance them if necessary. This way the direct profit motive is removed. Paul also spoke of some that simply came in to rob them of freedom; people who were opposed to the whole principle of original NT church and were effectively intent on making themselves the head.

For Paul himself, regarding finance, he said he refused to accept such financial support in order not to even raise the suspicion that he was there for that reason. Instead, his support came from him working as a tent maker, and later when others of his party who knew him arrived, he was able to take more free time as they worked together to support him. In all of this he spared the churches he went to of any expense, which is something we should certainly demand and stick to as we reintroduce the original model of NT church. Otherwise, many will soon be arriving who have their own agenda or are 'on the make' in some way.

Worldly leadership models – Opting for a single leader model of church almost invariably means displacing Christ as the head. It is only the nobility

of the leader that will prevent this happening, and even then, there are going to be the inevitable times of trouble that come from running under a worldly model.

The single leader model for a church is not something that can be endorsed from scripture. If it were a valid thing then we would certainly expect the scriptures to endorse it clearly, and with named leaders/elders. In fact, in terms of named leaders, we have the very opposite where the only man we see named is someone called Diotrephes who was rebuked by the apostle John, no less, because he 'must be first'. This man had used the power he had grasped to evict those that stood against him. Apart from him the only people we see named are apostles and evangelists that plant churches and moved on as God led them, and these generally always operated in groups of two or more.

The wording of the scriptures on this case with Diotrephes is really important because Jesus himself said that *'many who are first will be last'* in the Kingdom. This statement emphatically applies to those in the church that take the position of head in place of God, rather than making themselves servants and keeping themselves subject to the whole body, which is what the original model of NT church requires them to be.

If we are to move away from the modern church model, often with its single leader, to the original NT model, there is clearly going to have to be a transition which will inevitably be a difficult step for those that have been in this position for some time. We therefore devote a later section to the whole question of transitioning the modern church to the original NT model.

Humility – God may choose to speak to the church through a child, or someone unexpected, to test the church’s humility and readiness to hear his voice, regardless of the source. The church must remain open and available to such input, which it can only do if it maintains a structure of equal footing, and never allows any to take a position of superiority. This does not preclude the biblical roles that serve as oversight for the group, but they are there to oversee what happens, not to take control of it.

Unity of the Spirit – Unanimity on nearly any issue is virtually impossible in the world where the body of decision makers is of any size. For this reason, many would assume this model to be unworkable where unanimity of the whole body is demanded before a word can be accepted. However, this fails to take account of the vitality of the work of the Spirit.

If some continue to believe a word to be of God when others reject it, then the issue is put on hold and committed to prayer and fasting until resolved. This applies to all issues, but particularly where leaders discern that they are dealing with a key issue that is really important to the church. Then they should keep raising the matter in the meetings to make sure the whole body continues to be urged to seek the Lord until they come to a resolution.

If individuals who are genuine believers hold out against a genuine word of the Spirit on issues he is raising, then prayer has great power to bring the believers into one mind. Once a believer experiences the pressure for God's purposes that comes through prayer, they will be very careful in all further judgements that they make because they will be aware it can have a profound impact on them, and especially on fleshly issues where they are blocking progress.

At times, if the resistance is based on pride, God may choose to bring humility in some way, which may not be easy for them. Often if unanimity cannot be reached there is something of the world, the flesh, or the devil underlying it, but allowances have to be made for the fact that some things that come from the Spirit can be a leap forward that the body is not yet fully ready for, but the word is designed to put the issue on

their map so they can pray and fast, and bring it personally before the Lord ready for the right time. Prophetic gifts often bring this kind of word, so they often seem to flow against the stream. This also means prophetic people have to be patient with the body if the people don't resonate with their message straight away. They certainly must never seek to circumvent the proper NT church process of finding its way to a unanimous decision through seeking the Lord. Of course, while the jury is out on a matter, it may even seem the reputation of a prophetic gift hangs in the balance, but this is a normal part of the prophetic ministry that should be accepted, and in these circumstances great humility is called for on the part of the prophet. After all, we all get it wrong sometimes, and the validation of the church is important

If resistance to something is not of the Spirit, then often the power of prayer is likely to become immense. At other times it may simply be a call for patience until the time for it is right. In any case, if it is of God the Spirit will continue to raise it until it is resolved, and the church may even stand still for a while until unity is re-established.

In any event, the worst thing to do is to choose to override any member by force or authority. We are not authorised to exercise this

kind of authority over each other¹⁸. There may be times when one believer is identified to be consistently out of step with the body and are deliberately obstructive to the Spirit. It is conceivable that after some time the whole body must address this and, in the end, seek to choose to disregard their contribution, but generally this would be a dangerous thing to do, and it would be far better to wait and deal with the person and situation through prayer and fasting alone.

Living (and Speaking) by the Spirit – The original NT order of church works most smoothly when all are living in the Spirit and not in the old nature. However, the NT order is the most compatible environment for establishing and maintaining the believers in their walk of the Spirit, or re-establishing those that have slipped from it.

Doctrine can either greatly help or hinder in this area. Problems can arise where the issue of walking in the Spirit is not properly understood. Particularly the doctrines of faith, grace, and identification with Christ through dying to self by faith are vitally important. However, even where believers are wrestling with issues of the old nature, though their condition may prohibit them

¹⁸ Luke 22:25-26 – The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that...

from participating, it will not necessarily hinder the proceedings of the church in the meeting. Often, they will simply feel compelled to remain silent.

Where believers do choose to speak from the old nature it will usually be abundantly clear to all that this is so, and in an environment where Christ is present in power it will come across like a clanger, or like an off note in music. Where this happens, the word should not get any resonance from other members of the body and will probably seem to fall flat and be passed over without affirmation. This will become abundantly true when testing is called for. Most of the time this is a cue to move on and disregard what was said, rather than 'make a song and dance about it'. If, however, a word that seems wrong to any person does get some affirmation in the body then others that have no resonance with it, or feel it is simply wrong, are obliged to speak up and say they cannot affirm it is from God. If those that affirm it hold to the claim it is a good word, then the issue stays on the table and is committed to prayer and fasting for them to return to later. In all of this, the one who presides and all those present should seek to affirm the person/s who gave the word, thanking and assuring them, and encouraging them to continue to speak as they feel the Spirit is leading them. Of course, this person that gave the word has to be one of those that review it and

take it before the Lord to get more clarity on it. In some cases, such a person will instantly withdraw a word, realising that it is not hitting the mark – meaning that it does not have the affirmation of the Spirit. Often it is the case that we only realise a word we have been dwelling on is not accurate when we actually speak it in the body. It simply doesn't resonate as we would expect. Then the body becomes a kind of echo chamber where what we say bounces back to us and it has a clear hollow ring to it, rather than of something solid that is from God. Mostly the best way to handle it is for the members to say nothing. The word would be acknowledged as heard but passed over because it has not received any real affirmation.

In these cases, members sometimes make the mistake of thinking something God has said to them personally is to be delivered to the body, and so it does not have a resonance with the body. As members mature, they will come to discern the difference and realise they need a specific leading on when and where to share things they have previously received. At other times it may simply be the timing is wrong. They shared a word they received before they were prompted to do so. Experience suggests, as a general rule anything we receive should be put on ice (held back) until we receive a specific prompting from the Spirit to deliver it. Then it will

resonate with the body. In time maturing members learn this, and it can be helpful for apostles to teach this principle.

In current church models, whatever is said tends to politely pass the bar and the assumption made it is good, or that the members can take whatever they want from it. Under the original NT model, the opposite is true, in the sense that no word is accepted unless it has across-the-board affirmation from the whole body. Everybody still hears it of course, so it has made a mark, but all should understand, and be reminded frequently by the presider, that only words that have unanimous affirmation of the body should be taken as from God.

It is only through the activity of the whole body that prophetic words become regarded as safe and accurate. Of course, there are always some that are more proficient at testing, and they are a gift to the body as these are the ones with the confidence to speak up. But generally, all can discern the voice of the Lord and are able to recognise it when they hear it – which is true for both the word given, and for the testing.

Freedom – The most remarkable thing about the NT church is its freedom in the Spirit. This means as long as all members continue to speak and act

in ways that are recognised by all to be under the direction of the Spirit, they have total freedom.

Elders provide oversight, and part of their job is to constantly offer final affirmation that everything that is said and done is in fact from the Lord. They are appointed to the role because of their recognised and proven experience in these things in the body, and their knowledge of the scriptures to back it up. Of course, all members are also engaged in testing in the same way, but elders provide a recognised experienced oversight.

This means that elders do not necessarily contribute to a meeting at all, other than in testing along with the rest, if it remains under the direction of the Spirit. But they may of course make a contribution in the Spirit as any other would under the same leading. Generally, only the one presiding would then be needed to maintain order, which may be an elder, but could be any person that was recognised to be gifted by the Lord for the role.

This freedom was unprecedented before the NT church began, and in fact it would have been impossible for a worldly group to implement because the unity of the Spirit is the key factor.

In the early church days, there were many men around, particularly from those known as Judaisers, that promoted doctrines and systems of law that opposed this freedom, and they would

have enslaved the church to their own authority and ideas if they had the chance to do so¹⁹. Unfortunately, in the modern church in our day, this kind of binding of the freedom of the church is now the norm and is believed to be the true model of church.

Gifts & Ministries – The freedom of original NT church allows all the gifts and ministries that God had bestowed upon the body to emerge. It is therefore essential that all have the opportunity to serve in all ways as they believe they are led to do so, including preaching/teaching, song/worship and presiding, so that these gifts can emerge. However, for the prominent roles even the decision to step into these services must be tested and verified by the body to have been led by the Spirit.

The matter of who is encouraged to serve in these ways in a more prominent way should be a major matter for prayer in order that the gifts and ministries that God has given emerge and are identified and recognised by the body. However, when gifts and ministries are recognised, they should never be given opportunity in exclusion to others. The main issue with such things as

¹⁹ Gal 2:4 – some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves

preaching, teaching and worship are anointing of the Spirit, not ability. We should not therefore demand eloquence or style. Rather we should test everything on its value in terms of delivering what God has given them. This means that though the body should seek to give ample opportunity to any that have recognised gifting to express that gift, it should nevertheless always remain open to others that come forward with a conviction that God has given them something for the body in this form. Only if this freedom is maintained can the essential gifts and ministries continue to emerge. And only in this way are ministries prepared for the time when the church grows to the point of multiplication.

Theocracy – The true NT church structure is not a democracy where all have their opinion, and the matter is decided by a split vote. It is rather a theocracy where each submits themselves to discern God's voice in all things and speaks only as they believe they are guided to do so by the Lord. Yes, it operates through consensus, and in this sense could be seen by some as democratic. However, what is going on beneath this is the key factor that raises it to something greater than democracy – theocracy. For this reason, unanimity is sought because all that have the Spirit should be capable of being led by him and of hearing the

same things²⁰. There is an objectivity to the things we hear from the Spirit that much of the modern church has completely lost sight of because we never test these things together as we should. The lack of testing has meant many words of men have been spoken and remained unchallenged, leaving the onlookers with a sense that prophetic words of this kind are subjective, which they are if they don't originate from the Spirit. This is why we need the whole original NT model working to rediscover this objectivity (authentic words of God) and identify the words that don't have it.

To those that have no appreciation or belief in the common element of the Spirit in such a gathering it would perhaps seem like this is democratic, or simply chaotic, but in fact God is real and so is the leading of his Spirit. Though the modern church has such little experience of it in our day that some even doubt it is a real phenomenon. Of course, the same can be said for all the gifts of the Spirit, to the point where there are doctrines known as cessationism; believing that the Spirit no longer operates in these ways. For those people, this original model of NT church is going to be way off their map, and they are likely to pour the same scorn on it that they

²⁰ Rom 8:14 – those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

generally have for the gifts of the Spirit. In fact, I would say that the place where the current model of modern church is applicable and appropriate is with this kind of person, given that the original NT model of church is not even a possibility for them until they come to change their ideas about whether or how the Spirit operates.

Fortunately, the Spirit has been moving enough in our day with the gifts of prophecy, healing, miracles etc. that there are swathes of the modern church that are ready for this. Actually, when we read the writings of historical Christian authors, we can see that healings and miracles have always taken place in the church, but at some point, it was lost to many through the incursion of rationalism. The result was that these gifts disappeared in many branches of the church that went down that path. Naturally the same became true of the gift of prophecy and some interpretations of the scriptures were developed to cover that, which is actually a very difficult thing to do. The reality is that Joel prophesied that in the last days all flesh will prophesy including male and female, young and old (Joel 2:28). Then, immediately after the Spirit fell Peter declared, under the power of the Spirit, that the day Joel prophesied had now come (Acts 2:17). The early church then went out with that power to spread the gospel and plant church after church based on

that same power. We then see the apostle Paul giving directions on how that power operates in the church (1 Cor 12, 14).

After the Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost all of them realised and respected the fact that God was moving directly through each one. They therefore naturally set the church up to allow that to happen, so all could contribute. This model of NT church is simply a return to that realisation in a way that allows the Spirit to operate as he chooses in the church through all members.

So, this model of original NT church effectively pushes the envelope of prophecy back to where the early church had it, and as the apostle Paul says, this is the greatest gift we have. The main point here is that for this NT model of the church it is the Spirit that is in control, and he is free to use whoever he wants, whenever he chooses. It is the job of leaders to make sure they facilitate this, and do not in any way impede him. Later we will discuss further how the prophetic gift/s operate.

Elders – All NT churches always had a plurality of elders, and a plurality of deacons appointed to serve them once their gifts and calling were recognised for serving in this way. However, there would never be a chief elder or deacon. An elder would often preside, but the task may be

undertaken by any member by the agreement of the whole body, under the direction of the Spirit – as for every matter, thus allowing the gift of presiding to emerge in other members.

The plurality of eldership was and is essential, because if an elder presides he steps into a role as servant to the rest and as the youngest in the group while he undertakes the role²¹. From this position it is not possible for him to also provide oversight, so it is desirable that at least one other elder be present that could operate in the meeting on an equal footing with the rest of the body.

That said, when a new church begins it will be without any recognised elders or deacons. This is a formative period for a new church, once the apostles have left, where those gifts are allowed to emerge and be recognised by the body.

The elders always provide oversight, but do not necessarily provide the leadership to the body. That may come from any quarter as the Spirit leads and gifts them, and as their contribution is accepted by the body as from the Lord. However, the elders provide oversight on these leadings, as on all proceedings, using their gifts and experience of accurately hearing God's voice and

²¹ Luke 22:26 – the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.

their understanding of scripture as a mainstay and backup to the body in testing all that was said and done to ensure it was in the Spirit, and therefore from the Lord. As such their ministry is a safety net to the body, rather than as the main lead, which would instead come directly from the Lord as the head, through whoever the Spirit chooses to use.

Wherever a lead comes from it would be subjected to the same testing and validation by the whole body. Often a recognised gift of leadership will emerge under these constraints – which would translate into a gift to hear and discern a direction for the body from the Lord. Once direction has been accepted by the body, including the elders, as from the Lord, it is the elders that are responsible to keep this before the body so any necessary action can be taken. Often the lead for this will come from the person that brought the word, but not always – we should never presume. The Spirit will point the way forwards to all so the right members, gifts and actions are taken for the task to move forward as God wants. It is perfectly feasible and normal that one suggests a lead, the body accepts it is God, and others implement it, as the Spirit leads.

We have one interesting case in the scriptures in the church at Antioch where the Spirit calls for Paul and Silas to be set apart for an apostolic ministry. We have no knowledge of who

the leading word originally came from, and that is not important. The important thing is that it was accepted to be God speaking by the whole body, including Paul and Silas. The steps that followed were therefore in the hands of the elders, to send them off, and then these two once the elders had commissioned them to go.

Elders often have pastoral ministries, and so they provide pastoral care to the flock, though there may also be other pastoral gifts in the church. This care and support often take place in the background outside of the meeting environment. Their purpose is to provide support to maximise the gifts of these members. They may therefore either exercise pastoral gifts themselves or accompany the five-fold ministries between meetings to help these members move forward.

One goal would always be to help activate any members who feel led to participate in the meetings for the first time, or to review with them any words they personally gave or received in the meetings. For those already active in using their gifts in the main meeting, the elders would be able to constantly review this with them – including any words that hit the mark, and those that didn't. In some cases where they 'missed' with a word that was spoken by them (i.e., it received no affirmation, or it received some negative feedback), the elder would need to encourage

them to try again with another word, when prompted by the Spirit, if their words didn't seem to be received by the body.

Sometimes people are long-winded or unclear in the main meetings. In these cases, the elders can take this up in their background work with them to make them more effective, if possible. In this way there is always background coaching and prayer going on, especially from those with pastoral gifts, which often means elders. Of course, there must be tolerance for the inabilities of people and their foibles, but the elders are there partly to find ways to help the meetings flow well for the benefit of everybody, and this background work is therefore important.

One area where elders will normally be especially involved is in the background work with the ones who take the role of presiding, who may of course actually be one of the elders.

Presiding – Presiding is a key role in any NT church. The one who serves in this way must have the recognised gifting for it, and the necessary humility and grace to properly take the place of a servant, as the youngest among them, where they lay down their own part in the church meeting for a time in order to facilitate the rest of the body. At the same time this person will have control of the flow and direction of a meeting so they must be

able to be firm and to make decisions, which means they must also be strong enough to resist any member that would hijack a meeting or seek to impose themselves on it.

It is therefore essential that the whole body comes into agreement on who should be given the opportunity to preside, and his role and performance, regarding wisdom and fairness, should always be under review by the elders. The members also have a say in this outside of the meetings, as with everything else, but one principle that should be encouraged, though not enforced, is that of submission to leaders. Submission is a Bible principle that specifically applies in this case – to the presider, while he is doing his job. All members can't have it their way in a meeting of any size like this all the time, so there must be a principle of submission to the presider while he is taking this role as a service to all. Any feelings of prejudice or unfairness must be addressed later, after the meeting, with the aid of the elders. This is less necessary in home-sized gatherings but become really essential in the larger gathering.

With the original NT model of church, the whole teaching of submission falls neatly into place, whereas in modern church it has always been a problem as it has inevitably been interpreted into worldly power structures, which

lead to hierarchies. The NT submission should be, in every case, a voluntary submission. That means it is not something that is enforced. If members don't give it freely, then it can't be taken. We therefore only achieve it in the church by appealing to members to adhere to it, asking them to give it voluntarily, as the scriptures do. Any kind of enforcement would only introduce a worldly element that binds the freedom of people. This then becomes the thin end of the wedge for further degradation. The primary place of true biblical submission is to the leadership ministry of the presider so he can effectively lead the meetings – bearing in mind that to perform the role the presider has volunteered to take the lowest place of the youngest, and servant of all. This is the true kind of submission we see in the Kingdom of God. All else is taken from worldly ideas that don't belong in the church.

It must also always be understood in the body that it is essential to have more than one actively presiding member in different meetings so that every member, including those that preside, have the opportunity to contribute at some time on an equal footing with the rest, because they too are a part of the body. Of course, the presider does not completely set aside his view even when presiding, but he makes his view last. He too must agree with the decision when it comes to testing.

The role of presiding should always be open for new members to serve in this way – usually in response to proposals/nominations to the body from others that are prompted by the Lord to suggest it. Of course, such an invitation would depend on the one proposed/nominated accepting the role, and the agreement of the whole body that he should take it. As they step into this role their performance must be kept under constant review by all, but especially by the elders.

The need to identify the gift of presiding in the body is important because it is a key to the spread of churches as it will be needed as a vital element in each new church. Initially the apostles who plant a church will model this role with a view to identifying the right person/s to take the role and preparing him for it for when the apostles move on.

Deacons – All NT churches always had a plurality of deacons once they were appointed. These members would have administrative and practical gifts to use on behalf of the church. They would handle all matters to do with money. They would similarly engage in all other spiritual activities, but they would never also occupy the role of an elder, and equally an elder would not also occupy a role as a deacon.

The deacons would be active in meetings, like all other members, though not specifically acting as overseers on the proceeding as the elders would be. That said, they would probably be the first point of review on the elders themselves, as the elders would be on them. This is all part of the model of mutual accountability that should exist in the church, preventing the possibility of someone grasping the role of overall leader and taking sole control.

This is important because it is a degradation of the NT church order for a church to have a single leader. We therefore see in the NT model that the church only ever operates with a plurality of leaders (elders/deacons) or none at all, as it would have when it began. Therefore, if a church happens to lose part of its leadership in some way, then it must appoint new members to the role, or dissolve the recognised leadership so the church temporarily reverts to its original 'new church' form of no appointed leaders until the right time for appointment comes again. When the right time comes the existing elders and deacons may well then be reappointed, with the aid of the apostles, as the Spirit directs, but the point here is that the church should never be permitted to be reduced to a single leader model, or to have a single elder or single deacon.

It should be emphasised here that though deacons have a special role and gifting to serve the church, they are as available to the Holy Spirit when the church body meets, as for anyone else. The scriptures give huge sanction to this in the book of Acts where the deacon Stephen is seen to be working miracles and demonstrating the Kingdom of God in ways that surpassed even the twelve Apostles. And through this he became the first martyr in the church as he saw a vision of Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father to receive him at his death. This is a clear testament to the fact God wants us to keep a level playing field for all in the church so he can use whoever he chooses, whenever he chooses, in whatever way he chooses.

Church Growth – This model of church; where all members are active, is the reason for the explosive growth of church in the early centuries. New believers quickly mature by learning to hear, discern and obey the voice of God for themselves by allowing them to constantly exercise and compare their spiritual senses in the church gatherings with the more spiritually mature members of the body.

The original NT model also has all the necessary safeguards built into it such that once established, it can be left in the hands of even

relatively young believers without too much danger of deviation. In fact, this very thing of leaving a young church to operate alone would normally stimulate rapid growth and lead to all the gifts and ministries of the members emerging. For this reason, once the apostles had laid a firm foundation by clearly establishing the NT order, they would move on to establish new churches, and then return only as the Lord led them, or when the group sent for them for help to resolve problems. Typically, God would often lead the apostles back within a year or two of the body being left to operate alone, in order to appoint elders and deacons, because by this time these gifts would have clearly emerged and be recognised by the body through their contributions and service.

Until this point where appointments are made, a new church would be operating without appointments and would always be able to recall the apostles to help if it ran into trouble. Where a church has operated without this appointed leadership for some time, the apostles would return and appoint those that have become recognised and trusted by the body for their gifting and callings. Beyond making these appointments, the apostles can still be called back by the elders or any of the members to help resolve problems, or for any other reason, but the

appointments give the body a first port of call when trying to resolve issues.

Prophecy – Though the gift of prophecy is not generally fully unleashed in the modern church, there are places and occasions today where it is given scope to move, but not yet within the full original NT church order, which can be a problem.

It is not our purpose to discuss the gift of prophecy at length here because there are some excellent teachings available on it. But for those who can't envisage how this works in the original NT model of church, I will make a few relevant comments to try to make this clearer.

We already mentioned that Joel prophesied there would be a day when all people would prophesy, and Peter declared that day to have begun when the Spirit first fell at Pentecost. We also mentioned that the apostle Paul gave instructions about the way the early church should operate and keep order with these gifts in full flow, and with the Spirit being given the freedom to take direct control of the church so he could use whoever he chose, whenever he chose.

Many of us have seen prophecy used in some measure, but, as we have already said, this has not been within the full NT model and order of church where it is intended to operate. In this setting all the elements of presiding and

weighing/testing take place in public, under the watchful oversight of leaders. This is what makes the use of the prophetic gift really safe. By 'safe' we mean that not all that claims to be prophecy actually comes from God, and it is the job of the church to determine what is authentic, hence the testing.

In our day we tend to see/hear the gift of prophecy operate without this testing/weighing and verification taking place. As a result, we have all heard prophecies that we feel are dubious at best, and yet they appear to pass the bar without comment. As a result, some have been put off from the gift of prophecy, seeing it as a loose cannon that cannot be controlled. I recently read the words of a well-known prophet claiming he estimated only about 60% of his words were accurate. This underlines the need for the prophetic to be subject to wider testing before it is accepted.

Many modern church leaders would prefer to present a squeaky-clean image in their church meetings rather than see any of this messiness. But this is why we need a wholesale shift into the original NT church model. We then develop a different culture of church where we shift from avoiding anything that may not pass the bar, to allowing all but testing everything so all of us get to learn from it. Then only the messages that are

given the sanction of the whole body pass the bar. The massive payoff of this is that all get the benefit of publicly witnessing when prophecy gets the wholesale validation of the whole body and are also able to see/hear when the prophetic input is questioned or not accepted as accurate. It therefore leads to a learning curve for all present who are learning to discern the voice of the Lord, so even the inaccurate words become instrumental in training those present to accurately hear the voice of God. It has always been God's intention that this testing/weighing takes place openly in the body as a whole, and that all come to grow up in learning to hear the voice of God through it.

In the modern church we occasionally meet people that are mostly off track with their prophetic messages, who have come to see all the things they imagine to be God speaking. This is a mistake and can be a real headache for the modern church that does not really have a mechanism to deal with it. But in many ways with modern church this is not their fault as there is so little opportunity for them to learn the authentic voice of God in the modern church because there is no public testing of words that they can hear that will guide them.

For these ones, once they are exposed to this kind of public testing, they will soon come to recognise the kind of resonance that an authentic

word carries, over one that is merely sourced in man. The original NT church environment is therefore the perfect place for them to make this alignment and begin to adjust their senses to operate in the same way, by the Spirit. In NT church the elders also back up this learning in their care for the flock behind the scenes.

The word 'weigh' is a good one for what must take place in this process. The reason is simply that words that are authentic; that do come from God, carry with them real tangible 'weight'.

Consider that it is the word of God that brought the universe into being – it is that powerful and has that much authority. Contrast that to the words that are our own. Our words only have us to back them up. God's words have the same power that put the 93 billion light years of observable universe in place, and all that lies beyond it, which may even be infinite. Naturally his words carry great weight.

Whenever we listen to a person speak, we always weigh what they say, all the time looking for that 'ring of truth'. This is an intuitive thing that all people do, but it is very real. Even scientists follow these intuitive leads and often testify to them as the main drivers in their work. This same weight is what we all look for when members prophesy in the NT church body, and unless we

positively discern it, we cannot accept a word that is given.

However, we should understand that the Holy Spirit does not run around refuting every false word. If he did this the enemy would soon occupy his every moment, making him constantly point out falsehoods. Rather, what the Spirit does is give positive affirmation of the true words he is giving, and he basically ignores the rest most of the time. We therefore find that for words that were sourced in a person, or anywhere other than God, it does not have that affirmation and weight.

But some will always 'hum and hah' over it and wonder if it is authentic given that they don't necessarily have any negative discernment about it. As a result, an inexperienced believer may be tempted to accept something to be of God that is not from him. But the experienced believer will be actively looking for that positive affirmation of the Spirit before they even consider accepting it.

This is what needs to happen publicly in the body, and when it happens for a genuine word of the Spirit then that shared sense of authenticity, when all know it is a word of God, is soon learned. The result will be that all soon come to recognise and learn from each other what we are looking for in every case. And so in the body even the young and inexperienced Christians soon come to

understand how we actually weigh a word and recognise the voice of the Lord.

This is the road to maturity where we come to be able to divide right and wrong, good and evil. Without this backup from the whole body, the gift of prophecy has vulnerabilities. But if we use it this way together, as originally intended, very little will be passed that is not actually of God and we will confidently move forward in his will.

One very human (fleshly) problem has frequently been encountered with prophecy in the modern church. That has been where some have stepped up as 'prophets' and having got a few things right they feel they have a direct line to God and should always be listened to as if they are always speaking accurately from God.

Given that modern church does not have the necessary checks and balances in place, we often soon find these people making some big and humiliating blunders. This then reflects badly on the church that support them, and it has cast prophecy in a bad light.

For these reasons all words of prophecy have to pass the bar with the whole body before they are accepted, regardless of who they came from. We are all able to make mistakes of this kind – like Peter, who in one sentence declared Jesus to be 'the Christ the Son of the living God', and in the next spoke words of Satan trying to deter Jesus

from his mission to go to the cross for our salvation²².

The point is no-one is exempt. The whole church body is the final authority on these matters, and they must unanimously validate everything, no matter where it comes from.

At this point we plough headlong into the potential issue of pride. Are those that have operated for years in the modern church without this kind of accountability prepared to accept it? Leaders that preach sermons and prophesy also have to come into the place of accountability for us to move towards the original NT model of church. Until now they have publicly said what they like in pulpits with hardly any public instrument to either question or add to their words. In fact, I believe over time churches have deliberately developed the modern church model precisely so they can operate in this way, without this open accountability. But it has been a source of a whole lot of trouble for the church, eventually leading to the wholesale deactivation of the body.

This is something that must be given up if we are to now move into what God really has for us in the original NT model of the church to come. Leaders of all kinds must enforce the NT model of

²² Matt 16:16, 22

church by insisting that their own words are also tested, as they are for everyone else.

One thing leaders need to realise with the NT model is that by passing all of this responsibility to the body, they can step into their true place of oversight where they are the last line of defence against anything that is incorrect, rather than the initiator of everything as they usually are expected to be in the modern church.

This means they are relieved from that duty they feel of always initiating everything and being right. So they can relax a bit. The main ministry now comes from the body itself, not them – unless they choose to step up and participate in the same way alongside them.

Also, the problem of loose prophetic words is solved, and they can allow the gift to flow freely because anything that does not get the sanction of the whole body, including the leaders themselves, will be filtered out by the testing process that follows it.

So even a false word becomes a positive learning experience for the members. Sometimes a word will pass the bar with the whole body and the elders will be the ones to finally throw a damper on it. It is in these cases particularly where the inexperienced members learn a thing or two about listening to God.

However, leaders still have to be careful here because they too can get it wrong, and they may in the end, after prayer and fasting, have to acknowledge that.

In all this process of handling the prophetic flow, for any word that is getting affirmation in the church, the presider will do his job of giving opportunity to those that indicate they have something to add.

As words are added to affirm what has been said, often those wanting to speak will realise what they want to say has already been said, and so they don't need to add anything further. Any that want to put a damper on the word will continue to look for the space to speak.

In the end it will be clear if the whole body is ready to accept the word given, and the final nod on it will come to the presider from the elders. The presider will then confirm it is accepted, take whatever action is necessary – if any, and then move on to the next word.

If there is someone present that is still holding a reserve on the word given, then the presider will commit the matter to prayer and fasting for the whole body and he will affirm that it can be raised again (by anyone) when the time is right.

If a word is not getting affirmation, then the presider will move on fairly quickly without making

too much of a fuss about it. To reiterate a point earlier; what we should be doing is looking for the authentic word, and not focussing on those that missed the mark.

To put that another way: God wants us listening to him and not to anything else, so we focus on the word that has the Spirit's affirmation, rather than the one that doesn't have it.

In many ways the presider is like an auctioneer who waits only as long as necessary to know if he will get some bids, but is ready to move on quickly if the article is not going to sell. For the person who gave the word that was passed over, he/she should be encouraged to try again, but as discreetly as possible without dwelling on it or making too much of an issue about it. This is part of the skill and gifting of the presider.

Later this issue can be raised and reviewed with elders/pastors together with the person who gave it, to make sure the person is not discouraged by it, and to try to understand/discern the real source of their words.

The process of receiving prophetic words in the body can go on for some time. It has to be experienced to fully understand the power of such a thing, but Paul gives an indication of it when he describes what will happen if an unbeliever comes into the meeting and they hear everyone prophesying (1 Cor 14:24-25). Few of us fully

realise the power these gatherings had in the early church; and will have again today if we recover it.

In the early church it was so powerful that some were even afraid to join (Acts 5:13).

Modern Church – Having defined original NT church, as in the Bible, let's take a moment to reassess the practice and values of modern forms of church.

Clearly these forms are not void of spiritual value or none would have ever grown spiritually at all within them. The corporate worship is clearly of value. So is communion. Both of these require participation, which is a key thing. The teaching is also of value (if sound) and has an important place – however what is clear is that a church environment where the members are mainly inactive cannot replace the true dynamic interactive environment of NT church where all those present are freely engaged in its meeting activity. So, if the teaching replaces this activity, as it has in modern church, then this is a degradation from the original NT model.

One preacher remarked that when you have been in (modern) church for 20 years you learn to sleep during the sermon with your eyes open. When you have been there for 30 years you learn to sleep with eyes open and also shout 'amen' at the right moments.

Amusing as this is, sadly it is getting at a real truth about the inactivity and lack of dynamism in our modern church. However, where the NT church engages in its main activity of body ministry, the whole body should be active and fully engaged at all times, because any person may be prompted by the Spirit to contribute at any moment, if they make themselves available.

Maybe one place in the scriptures where the modern church can derive some comfort is in Acts where the young man fell asleep and then accidentally fell out of a third story window during one of Paul's sermons.

In the early church there were clearly also times when more extensive teaching was given, especially by apostles when they visited, but they never departed from the interactive model where there could be Spirit led interjections at any time. Nor would they, as a whole, ever fail to test all that was taught to verify it as of the Spirit, as they did for everything that was said or done amongst them.

The modern church meeting environment as it is, where the members are largely inactive and just listen, must therefore be regarded as a special environment that only has value in *addition* to the normal church meeting in the original NT model. It must never replace the interactive meeting where all members are engaged and

participating and may be led by the Holy Spirit to play a part at any time.

Nowadays this kind of message delivery can be done on the internet so there is certainly no necessity to displace the normal church meeting.

Where the present church model seems to be most successful in serving the spiritual needs of the people, is in large churches where there are multiple small groups that operate on something close to the NT model. At least in the small groups people can get the chance to participate and be interactive, if it is structured that way. The larger church then becomes an affiliation of these smaller interactive groups, and the meetings become focussed on evangelism, teaching, or other things that have spiritual value in addition to the normal NT church meeting.

This is certainly a better form of modern church as it approaches the original NT model, but still what it misses is the incredible dynamism that can come from a larger gathering where the Spirit is free to move in the same way. This has yet to be rediscovered.

Going back to the book cited at the beginning of this document, which highlighted the shortcomings of modern church and expounded the original and true model – One key point A.R. Hay makes is that the church was never intended

to be run and dominated by professional ministries. Often this begins with someone developing an ambition to make the church their career, and then, having taken control, they become profoundly protective over it, given that their whole career and living depends on it.

To achieve security these leaders often find it impossible to resist the temptation to take control, and under the current models of church they often see no fault with doing that.

Typically, they then go on to remove every area of risk so their job and career is secure. In the process this produces a church that is stultified, lacking the vitality of the early church, so the people become passive as most of their opportunities to function in their gifts and ministries are removed. Not completely of course, but any that get a role do so only after careful vetting by the leaders, which most of the time is motivated by the desire to avoid anything that may threaten their position or security. It is a very common story in the modern church.

Of course, there are a few leaders that break out of this straight jacket in modern church, in some measure, and find ways of giving the Holy Spirit some freedom to move within their programmes. But this is still a far cry from the freedom that the NT church had, and that is described in this document and A.R. Hay's book.

In our day it is not uncommon for someone to become the founder of a new church and then rule it thereafter, making it their life and career. This can be stifling for a number of reasons. The NT model of church should really be planted by apostles and then, when ready, left to develop under its own care, developing plural leadership, while the apostles carry on planting, or revisiting planted churches, which is the way the scripture shows us it should be.

For others, they grow up in the current models of church and never really question the validity of its structure and order. Those that do question it tend to realise there is a real problem and decide against becoming part of its leadership, which has the effect of leaving it to those that don't realise there is a problem, often because they are blinded by the potential rewards.

And so modern church perpetuates itself as a regime based on these same erroneous models.

One thing that has become a phenomenon of our day is the mega-church. As mentioned earlier, I do know of cases where the church is really a collection of small groups, and in this respect, they definitely come closer to the NT model if these groups have NT freedom. But in the church meetings themselves there is normally very limited

opportunity for the kind of interaction described in this NT model.

Can NT church work on this mega scale? The answer is NO; church was never intended to operate in this way.

That doesn't mean there is no place for very large gatherings, but these should be seen as special events, for special purposes, and not the normal regular gathering. For example, when recognised apostles comes to the church claiming to have a specific message from the Lord for the church, such a meeting may be called to hear them.

But for normal church gatherings, do we really believe that church requires us to build these vast ornate structures, or these expensive shopping mall sized buildings before we can meet? Church cannot spread rapidly with that kind of overhead.

The point with the NT model of church is it is designed to meet in the size of room that can be found anywhere and everywhere. The numbers for an individual gathering are therefore limited, but that size of church is conducive to a reasonable level of intimacy where all can become active in its proceedings, rather than the inactivity of the mega-church. They then quickly learn how church is done under the original NT model and spread/multiply easily to new venues.

What is the ideal size of a NT church meeting?

– This is a personal view, but I believe the scriptures give us some indication of the answer to this. When we look at Jesus and the gospels, we see several groupings. There are the three disciples that formed an intimate group with Jesus – Peter, James and John. Then there are the twelve disciples that seems to correlate to the family or home group. Experience tells me that for normal home groups, twelve is a preferable maximum and it needs to multiply if it grows much larger.

In the same way I think the scriptures give us an indication of the ideal size of the NT church gathering where the Spirit is in control. That is given in *Acts 2* where the Spirit first fell. The number present is given as 120 people.

Based on that I believe church should form with about 40 to 60 believers and begin to look to multiply when they rise above 120. Within that there is then scope for 10 or more typical smaller groups of up to 12 people, and numerous intimate groups of 3 people.

This is a real extended family group size where all can know everybody in the group. In this size of church setting of 120, if the correct NT model is used, and there is a gifted person presiding, it is of a size that all that are present have the scope to participate on some level. In

fact, in the past, before the modern technology of sound equipment, it would have been essential to stick to this size limit as in larger rooms some would have struggled to be heard.

Modern technology can help us break that barrier, and it is useful to know that, but there are a number of reasons why this is still the optimal size for NT church that technology cannot affect.

With this size of meeting, we can find rooms to accommodate such a gathering without too much trouble using public buildings or function rooms (pubs, villages halls, clubs, schools), and the environment is big enough to have a great dynamic without isolating any members from the possibility of participation. All this means the church learns quickly and multiplies rapidly as it should, and as it did in the early days after the Spirit fell.

With this kind of model, we also find ourselves operating mainly from public places, rather than from religious buildings that many outsiders would never set foot in.

In our day the church building has often become a barrier and liability when it comes to reaching new people. There are of course some great social benefits to having a building, if it is used well, but it is not a necessity for a church to gather, and it is a huge scandal much of the time to have such underused facilities.

Does this mean there is no scope for large gatherings? – My answer is that the large gatherings also have a place and a dynamic that is valuable, but not as the normal regular church meeting. They are the special events that happen as extras to the normal church gathering, and they are generally run by people with an apostolic gift when they have something specific from God to give – which means they have some kind of special message or gift to share with the wider body.

In fact, in many cases of modern church today, the churches are actually established and run by a person with an apostolic gift. They do this because with the current model of modern church it is simply the only way for them to reach people with what they have to give – they have to have a church of their own. If the NT principle/policy of open access to churches were in place, they would have the freedom to go and offer their services wherever God sends them, as intended (apostle means – sent messenger). But with modern church this is just not a possibility because access is closed, unless invited, so instead they often resort to establishing their own churches where people can go to hear them.

The problem with this is that it is just not the original NT model of church, and if people make this their regular church experience there is

the danger that they will become passive through lack of opportunity to participate. However, given that few modern churches are offering any more freedom than this, as things are now the truth is they might as well go there as anywhere else. In these places the apostle may have a gift that is spiritually beneficial, and the people may grow under it. However, it can never replace the kind of growth we expect to see in the NT church we are discussing here because the activity of the whole body is the thing that stimulates the incredible growth that was seen in the early church.

What place do the scriptures have? – This is a key question that must arise because we are considering a radical shake up of the church structure and order, and in many modern churches the scriptures have a key place. We ask:

Do the scriptures currently have the correct place for NT church?

Is this how it was in the early church?

In many modern churches the scriptures have been elevated to an extremely high level, such that it has virtually become an article of faith for many to say the scriptures are the final authority on everything.

To begin to address this, let's first consider an obvious truth – the early church had the Old Testament, but they didn't have the New Testament scriptures as we have. It took time before these were assembled and made available for all the churches. When they were written they were passed on as individual books/letters as something of real spiritual value, given that some of them bore a direct witness to the things Jesus said and did. But the scriptures did not have quite the place that the modern church has now given them, or at least those that would consider themselves the modern evangelical church.

This modern-day elevation of the scriptures came about largely during the reformation when the Pope of the day was regarded as the final authority on everything, and the Protestants challenged that idea, putting the scriptures as the final authority in his place. However, things were never as cut and dried as evangelicals like to think they were.

When deciding on what should be accepted in the canon there was, and is, a fair amount of disagreement. Not least from the main architect of the reformation, Martin Luther, who expressed some measure of disdain for some of the books that have been included; mainly because they didn't fit well into the new revelations he was

bringing to the church, which were also based on the scriptures.

Add to this the fact that if you pick up a Roman Catholic bible today you will find it includes a number of books that the Protestants rejected as part of the canon, though some of these were still accepted by the Protestants to have some real spiritual value, and so they should not be completely rejected.

Then, of course, outside of this there are many books and letters that both camps hold to have some value but are not deemed to be worthy of inclusion in the canon.

And finally, there are some books that were circulating around the time of the early church that both sides mostly reject altogether.

When we think about NT church and the way it operated under the leading of the Spirit, we realise why the modern church felt the need to elevate the scriptures – they had lost the authority that comes from the whole body when it works together by the Spirit to validate what God is saying.

In the original NT model of church, the scriptures served as a source of inspiration, and as another backstop against anything that did not agree with them. But the actual final authority in the church was on the agreement of the whole body on what the Spirit was saying.

Of course, all members would make use of their knowledge of the scriptures to help discern the voice of God, but they were all focused primarily on the Spirit, and hearing him, rather than on making the scriptures the final authority.

The vast amount of splintering that has happened in the protestant churches since the reformation, often based on theological differences, testifies to how much disagreement there is on the interpretation of the scriptures. And some of this is not trivia, but the very fundamentals of the faith.

Once again what we see in all this is man creating his own order and substituting one thing for another according to his own wisdom: in this case the direct work of the Spirit for the scriptures.

Of course, once the NT body ministry is lost, together with the collective testing and affirmation of what the Spirit is saying, then either the scriptures or some person becomes the obvious substitute. What church history shows us is that neither of these have fared too well when they take that place. No matter how good a thing is, it is important to give it its God ordained place. The scriptures are profitable for us in discovering the truth, but this is the day of his Spirit, and he is intended to become the new means by which we discover his mind and receive his revelations, even if he does use the scriptures to give it to us.

Today we have a living Word, as the scriptures tell us. Of course, there is a desire in our nature to have a final 'word' which we can use to pin down every matter. However, the reality is, when it comes to God there is always a certain level of mystery, and it is part of God's intention that we keep open-minded on many things; accept each other's differences; and look to him for revelation that will bring clarity. This position is ongoing and cannot be stitched up as we would like so we don't need the Spirit anymore; though some, we have to say, have tried their very best to do this.

To sum this up, our way into the wider unity of the church is not to finally all agree on a definite interpretation of the scriptures, but to reintroduce the NT church order so the Spirit can once again lead the way step by step.

Technically speaking, the actual final authority is really the agreement of the whole wider church and body of Christ on what God is saying by the Spirit. When it is agreed across the board of all that share the Spirit then we can be absolutely certain we have a genuine word of God. This is exactly how the scriptures were identified. Of course, this is difficult to discover, but the local church of a reasonable size is a sample of this larger body and something that is more accessible. As such it can be trusted far more than any

individual, so we should seek to access it, which is exactly what NT church is meant to do.

This also highlights the benefits of crossflow from other churches. Through this we get a chance to test our church experience and learning against that of the wider community of Spirit filled believers, which is why we maintain open access for all that come to us. In addition to this we should also recognise that just as individuals have different gifts and ministries, so God uses different churches in a similar way. They each have a unique character and gifting of their own. All of this is intended to allow them to make a unique contribution to the wider body of the church, so for this reason too we should seek to welcome and encourage crossflow between churches and always therefore maintain open access.

Where does all this leave the modern church? –

Often the basic belief of much of modern church, given its order and the way it is structured, is that people need knowledge: knowledge of the faith and knowledge of God. The modern church has therefore become primarily teaching based for the purpose of the dissemination of knowledge.

Many have realised this is a mistake and have taken steps to reorder their churches so that

relationship is the main priority, and teaching takes a lower place. This may mean relationship with other believers, or relationship with God, or both. Whichever it is, it affects the way the church is ordered to meet that purpose.

Original NT church has the clear priority of developing a relationship with God first and developing relationships with people second. Why is this priority the correct way? Because in NT church people quickly learn to hear the voice of God for themselves since God has a means to be very personal with them through the freedom he has in the body, and they have the chance to develop their ability to hear him through comparison with the developed spiritual senses of others.

When people learn to hear God in this way then that ability becomes the basis for them to be taught directly the Holy Spirit, as the scriptures say²³, and as was prophesied would happen in the day of the Spirit in the Old Testament.

The NT model relies on this as the primary source of teaching, rather than the teaching of others, even though the Spirit may use others in the process. So, alongside the development of personal spiritual senses, in NT church all members are used by God to speak to each other

²³ 1 John 2:27, Is 30:21

so in this way the whole body is used in that teaching process, even though it all comes from the Holy Spirit.

In the NT model, additional events where apostles and teachers teach more extensively are still used by God to teach, but the NT model of body ministry has many additional benefits. One of those is that it is a process that is shared by the whole body, so it develops the unity of the body in a greater way, bringing the whole body into a unity of faith.

When NT church is active in this way, the priority of the need for formal teaching is lowered to where it should be.

In many ways NT church is like giving people a fishing rod, rather than a fish. By learning to hear God for themselves they can more easily be taught by God directly. They also then receive things that the Spirit can get them to pick up and use to give to others in the NT meetings, and so they are enabled to bless each other.

What about denominations? – Denominations are a phenomenon of modern church. They represent streams of believers that to some degree separate themselves from the rest of the wider church, usually based on some specific emphasis of the faith.

So, the question is how does this fit into the original NT model of church?

My first point on this is that I have found many people share a certain level of grief that I believe stems from the Holy Spirit on the way things have developed with denominations. There is a general feeling that this is a construct of men, not God, and as such it does more harm than good.

I think the problem is not that churches form into groups that share an emphasis or a set of values. Rather that it is a level of separation that prevents a crossflow of cultures that would be greatly beneficial to people in their faith.

From early on in my journey I deliberately crossed these streams, both in fellowship and in my spiritual reading. What I found was this was the thing that stimulated my faith more than anything else. The reason is it gives us exposure to valuable things that we have lost or have faded in our own stream.

This is where the reason for the principle of openness in the NT model of church comes into focus. That openness allows access for people that God sends to us from other streams. They don't have to jump through all our manmade hoops to get access to our churches as we see in modern church. Instead, they are welcomed, but their

contributions are subjected to the same validation that we demand of ourselves.

Fortunately, over my lifetime I have seen the internet emerge and break down these denominational barriers to some extent, by giving people an easy window into what is going on in other churches. Many have therefore realised that other streams have things of real value.

This has not happened with the blessing of those that are denominationally minded, but it has been an unstoppable change that they have simply had to accept.

God seems to be fulfilling a prophecy I heard, and resonated with, that God will change the face of the church in a single generation. The latter end of this change is likely to be the most dramatic, I believe, as it may well mean the rediscovery of the original NT church order we are discussing here.

When we think of the original NT church model, the whole denominational idea loses much of its meaning, precisely because of the principle of open access. If we implemented this freedom across the board then what we would find is not that God would send us ministries that are most like our own, but those that are very different to our own because they are the ones that will have most to share with us and will therefore be most stimulating.

This pretty much turns the denominational idea of modern church on its head and does the very opposite thing from that for which denominations were developed. The reality is, the closing of access for outsiders to our churches, and the separation that has come from denominationalism are both attempts to control and dominate sections of the church, which has naturally moved into a competitive race between these streams that is entirely a manmade and worldly thing. As such it is closely linked to the single leader model of church that is also often about the same kind of domination where ministers secure for themselves a job and a position.

The NT model demands that we move away from all of this. That leaders again become true servants and that they behave in ways that are most beneficial to the people and not themselves.

The problems of the single leader model – When church deviates from God’s blueprint we can expect something quite messy and problematic to emerge. We have already made some comments on the problems of the single leader model and explained that this is a worldly modification of church compared to the original model. But to be sure that the importance of this is properly emphasised we should cover it further and draw

on the long experience we have had of this kind of church order up to the present day.

The problem that has always cropped up with the single leader model is that of the potential for the alpha male takeover, or indeed sometimes the alpha female. True NT church requires leaders that are servants, not just in name, but in fact. Rarely does a single leader model turn out in truth to be a *servant* model. Usually, it becomes a *king* model where the people serve the leader, and the leader rules them; though sometimes the reality of this is disguised with token platitudes that deny this underlying reality.

This problem of the alpha male stepping up to grasp the single leader role and then dominating the church has been a universal problem in the church that has occurred across the board. The problem is that an individual can easily go wrong, step out of line, and develop ideas about themselves and their power that become a real problem for the church. The same kind of problem we see quite commonly in the world. In these situations in modern church there is no easy mechanism to correct the problem other than for the church to pass through a crisis, demanding a regime change, which can sometimes even threaten its very existence.

Is this really how it is meant to be? Is this how these rogue elements that step up should be dealt with?

What we find is that modern church has developed all sorts of manmade methods to try to solve, or at least control this problem. Many are aimed at prevention before it occurs. To a large extent it is these measures that have evolved the kind of church we have come to develop in our day. Most often it is the single leader model that is at the root of the problem.

Sometimes these coping methods involve long training programs where the up-and-coming leader develops and demonstrates his humility, and therefore his fitness to take the role. This does not eliminate the possibility of him becoming an alpha once he has the power, but it lessens the probability of it. The irony here is that once the main leadership is alpha, they will often pass on those values, in which case change is not possible without some kind of crisis, which may take decades to happen.

Another coping method is to only ever appoint a person that looks like they will never pose a threat of becoming an alpha. The church is then led by those perceived to be the weakest, which is far from ideal. I doubt that the likes of the apostle Peter or Paul fell into that category. Of course, God did humble both of them, but still the

single leader model was not a position that was even on offer in the early church.

Some churches or denominations have tried to develop a democratic system, or to limit the time a leader can stay in the role before they are moved on. All of this is designed to mitigate the risk of alphas stepping up and seizing control.

Sometimes the single leader is reined in by his accountability to the denomination, but then we come to develop a hierarchy, which again is a worldly idea.

These problems lead churches to become worldly in their structure and ways. Churches can become racked with political problems. There may be attempted takeovers where one single leader displaces another, until they too fall to the same fate – operating under the same principle as a pride of lions.

As in politics, when leaders begin to take their power for granted and feel their position is secure, then there is the temptation to use their power to become controlling or abusive, or to operate in their own interests.

Sometimes alphas rule by personality, where they use the strength of their personality to keep down potential opposition. At other times they may rule using administration, so any person that is perceived as a threat to the resident alpha is simply denied opportunity in the church, and

the people are conditioned to accept this, sometimes with demands placed on the members for honour and loyalty to existing leaders. In these cases the stronger members that get this kind of treatment often leave the church, so we end up with only those that will conform. All of this is the messiness of deviating from God's true model and order, and thereby becoming something worldly.

For many individuals the driving force towards the single leader position is the financial rewards seen in modern church. Too often we see cases where once the leader feels secure, he takes steps to hike up his salary way beyond the level of the members.

Right now, I am thinking of an occasion where a leader, who was on a considerable salary, used his time in the spotlight to fish for huge personal gifts from the people present, instructing them how to bypass the church when they gave to him – something he had clearly done many times before.

Then there was the time the leader, who was also on a considerable salary, decided to take up an offering from thousands of people for his birthday. This kind of unabashed public embezzlement of funds is only possible because leaders have developed regimes where they function as lords and go unquestioned by members when they push the boundaries in this

way, even becoming desensitized to the corruption of it.

In the modern day we have even seen this kind of thing reach a global stage, to the detriment of the church and its mission.

At the same time, I can think of other leaders that were profoundly conscious of the cost of their services, and so were very careful even handling the minutia of financial details in order to avoid any hint of mishandling. Thankfully greed does not always take over.

On the whole I find single leader churches are very cagey about open disclosure of salaries. It is treated as a taboo subject. Even where charity laws force a measure of disclosure, you often find it obscurely buried in the detail of documentation where only the minimum demanded by the law is disclosed.

Not all churches would allow the kind of abuses I describe, but the point is, the possibility for it exist in the single leader model much more than is possible under original NT principles. Leaders who take advantage of their position in these ways are truly fleecing the sheep, and that is a step along a really bad path. Some leaders realise this is a problem that looks bad, and so appoint trustees (sometimes also paid) to take financial responsibility. This is a step towards the deacon model which ought to be better, but the

problem is often these appointments are made by the single leader and the roles are given to those that will support his claim, so it is only a disguise for what is really happening. The disparity in salaries between the leader and the members then effectively becomes another layer of hierarchy – which is another aspect of a worldly system. We only have to read church history or read some of the historical novels that were written to expose and protest at all this to see how history is replete with examples of this kind of thing, as it is in the modern-day church.

Do all single leaders succumb to the temptations? No. Fortunately many that occupy these positions have a measure of real nobility because the vetting of leaders to avoid alphas works to some extent. However, the real problem that applies across the board with all this is that where we operate a single leader model it is very difficult to also operate on original NT principles, so this modern church model stands as a barrier to the real deal, with all of its blessings and benefits.

The original NT model resolves all this simply by promoting the value that there is no single leader, except the Lord, and by creating a level playing field where all are free to participate, and where all are subject to the rest of the body in what they say and do. In the church, leadership is always plural, and their role is oversight, not

control. Every member is empowered to protect the church and its order. None will be ignored or overridden, but time and prayer will be given to allow the body to come into voluntary unity on everything – as much as it takes. There is simply no room in this original NT model for the alpha male (or female) to function, and any that try to take such a role will be seen as deviant, so they will not succeed. If they do manage to wrest power, regardless, there is still the apostolic help available to be called on to correct it, thereby giving us another level of protection in the NT model. This is why we say it is essential that all elements of the original NT church order are implemented together because only then will it be properly protected from this kind of degradation.

I believe in time, as the original NT model of church is rediscovered, the existing structures and order of church will come to be regarded in the same way that bankers are now seen in the way they were operating around the time of the 2008 financial crisis; the modern church system lacks the necessary accountability and is simply flawed.

Fortunately, there are many single leaders today in charge of our churches that have some nobility about them. They are like the good kings of the Old Testament. They are to some extent aware of the traps and failures of their position

and so they run their churches, as far as they understand it, on good spiritual principles, avoiding the abuses. These will come to be seen as those who were faithful in times of corruption and will be commended for it. We all wish for leaders of this kind until the original model of NT church is rediscovered. But the church will not return to the full power and dynamism of the early church until this happens.

New technology – In the last few decades the world has changed radically through the introduction of new technology. The emergence of the internet now means the very best of teaching in the whole world is at the fingertips of every person that has access to it. The church was always intended to run on the NT body ministry principles, rather than having the priority of teaching. Nowadays the fact that teaching has become so accessible has completely ‘pulled the rug’ from beneath the teaching-based church. In modern churches people still currently come together to sit in rows, not interacting, but receiving teaching from a local preacher that is most probably of far lower quality, and not as well presented, as the video messages they can access online at any moment they choose. It now becomes surreally ironic that when some members get bored with the sermon, they can take out their

smart phone and with the aid of wireless headphone technology and maybe long hair they can listen to such a message, all the time pretending they are referencing the scriptures cited in the current sermon, of course, just to be polite.

For good reason the modern church is asking key questions about just why it comes together at all. So far corporate worship has become the main reason for many, though of course from the point of view of church leaders, it is also to give their financial offerings – but for what? What this technological development has done is to make the modern church ask serious questions of itself. The answer to this dilemma of what should happen in church is found in the prophetic, where a church hears from God directly in a dynamic and personal way. The original NT church fully fulfils this purpose and is therefore more relevant than ever in our day, and the modern church has become more outmoded than ever.

Of course, as technology develops it may become possible to have fully interactive meetings with people that are remote from each other but connected over the internet. We know for a fact that, given the infrastructure, technology can go this far and handle this level of communication. And, given the right infrastructure, even to the

degree of transmitting holographic images of many people into the same room. How effective it will be to have a virtual NT church meeting like that, we can't yet imagine, but it may be very effective. When it happens, it may then even make the idea of the church needing any kind of premises redundant! To be sure about this we need to test it and see what effect it has on the dynamics of the church environment, and if the Spirit will be as present as he would be in an actual meeting venue. Of course, the one thing that remains impossible in this way is physical touch. For some that is an important love language so we can always expect the physical church meeting to have something that the virtual meeting can never have. That said, I feel God has plans to use the technology that is emerging to great effect, and I resonate with prophecies I have heard that point to that very thing. If so, we have some exciting days ahead of us.

For modern church this would mean simply viewing the same thing with others, which we effectively do already through video, which may even be live. With the interactive NT model however, the technology is still developing for all to engage with each other fully, but once it arrives it will be possible to join a meeting of that kind and fully participate in body ministry whenever we choose. In those places the meetings may be

made up of diverse people from all over the world. If language technology also develops a bit further then this may even resolve the language barrier, and in fact may become the only way to have a meeting with others that have different languages from ourselves.

Of course, social media and text chat rooms already happen. So does web conferencing in business which includes video. Also, there are incredible shared environments and experiences in the gaming world. However fully interactive online NT church has not yet happened to my knowledge, although it could clearly happen to some degree already using current technology. I think the reason for that is simply that the original model of NT church has not yet been rediscovered, but as soon as it is I expect it to happen over technology in an explosive way. It may even happen in some way before the NT model is rediscovered and evolve into the true NT model from there. My view is God wants this whole NT model to be physically rediscovered now to become a basis for that revolution. One thing I have said is that for the original NT model to work it must have all elements present, including the presider who understands the role, and the process of testing all things. Without this order the early experiments with NT church are likely to be

much messier, and may break down, so it is better that this model is properly rediscovered first.

I have in fact discovered some places that are trying to use technology to extend the modern church model. In one case I walked into a cinema that was utilised for the purpose. However, I found this to be a very sad experience. Not only was there a disconnection between the people, who simply sat in rows and viewed a show, but the preacher was not even present as he was transmitted through a web link. This seemed sad because there was an even greater disconnect than there is in modern church. At least where the preacher is physically present there is some connection between the preacher and the congregation. The experience served to convince me further that what we need is original NT church with full interactivity between all members, where all can participate and be active in the meetings. Once we rediscover original NT church then maybe technology can be made to serve that purpose in some measure, but for now what I look forward to most is sharing a physical room with others under the NT model of church where we are fully present to each other and to God in every way.

Presiding Over Church Meetings

The role of presiding in a church meeting is a key role for true NT church. It is therefore important that it is done correctly according to NT principles. If any aspect of the NT order is missing then there will be problems, and a risk that the whole thing will break down. The true model is properly balanced so every element should be present and working. The one presiding is key to this so the following points are designed to define the proper functioning of the role.

One thing we must stress about this first is that though the term presider has been chosen, we are in no way thinking of a president – meaning some kind of executer. What we mean is someone who presides, period. He offers a service to the body. That is all.

Servant & youngest – The one who presides (the presider) must take the position of the servant of all present and become as if he were the youngest present. As the youngest he must temporarily lay down his place of equality with the rest in order to serve the church to make sure all are given every possible opportunity to contribute their gifts and ministries in the meetings, on an equal level with all others, as they are led by the Lord to do so.

Testing – The presider must make sure that every contribution is at some point tested according to the criteria that the word or contribution given is from the Lord. It is not the presider’s job to rely only on his own judgement. He must simply decide when a point has been reached where what has been offered should be tested by the body, and he must preside to implement it.

Requests for testing – The presider would normally be the one to decide when the time has come to test what is currently being given, but testing may also be initiated by the presider at the request of any member that is prompted by the Lord to ask for it. The presider must decide on whether to respond to such a request, and may accept or decline at any point, but the opportunity to call for testing must remain open at all times. The presider should be more inclined to accept it if others affirm they feel it is the right course for the meeting at the present moment, as they are guided to do so by the Spirit. The presider must rely on the guidance of the Spirit in making these choices or responding to these requests.

When is testing appropriate? – Testing is normally appropriate after several contributions on a word or leading of the Spirit, which may be described as

a wave of the Spirit touching some subject, issue, revelation or instruction. The presider must discern when all/enough contributions on the present wave have been given so that it can be validated and affirmed to be of God before the meeting moves on. The Spirit will then be ready to move on to something else.

One point worth making here is that there is generally some kind of rhythm to the moving of the Spirit in an NT meeting. Often people hear something from the Spirit that others are also hearing in some form. Those that share the word that has been spoken are then usually keen to add their voice to what is given, and so particular messages that originate in God often come from more than one person at a time, with the effect that it comes like a wave.

The musical analogy here is a good one. The Spirit does make a kind of music in NT meetings with the spoken words of members, where their words resonate to us from the Spirit, and they resonate together to form a *symbiont* whole. Of course, many of us have experienced this with spiritual songs and praise, where people move off on a wave and add their own words, notes and sounds (if allowed). And if the Spirit is guiding it there is a remarkable resonance to it all even though these moments are not orchestrated. What we have yet to rediscover is that a very

similar thing can happen with the spoken word, as well as the sung word, where prophecy is in full flow.

There is currently a move of the Spirit going on in the church around the world that is known as 'burn worship', which simply means extended times of worship where people are relatively free to flow with songs of praise and worship, as they are led. I first came across this new phenomenon when I found myself in a thirty day and night continuous worship burn in London around the 2012 Olympics that took place in the city, where I came to lead the 'Healing on the Streets' initiative that accompanied it. The experience of the burn was life changing. In that environment I experienced the remarkable ways the Spirit can move through music on a whole new level, which also led to some phenomenal healings and miracles on the streets of London. My view is that this burn worship movement is a precursor to the rediscovery of the NT model of church where the Spirit is able to move in a similar way through the spoken prophetic word in the whole body, as well as through song. All that is needed is for us to set up the environment so the Spirit can take control and operate in this way, which is what original NT church is all about.

In music there is a constant flow of notes and chords that hang together and complement each other. Within this there are always notes like sharps and flats, or minor chords, for example, that sometimes seem a little off key on their own until the next note or chord comes in to complement it. Music is built of these tensions and releases, which is what makes it exciting. After spending some time in an extended worship environment with others that I soon got to know well, I became aware in a new way of how the Spirit can take hold of each individual to express himself within the whole. This applies to whatever ways we offer ourselves to him so he can express himself. In the NT church the same kind of thing can also take place in the spoken prophetic flow, and at times some of this was included in the praise and worship setting. As it is for the music, there will be times where the words that are given seem incomplete or slightly off on their own, but then complimentary words or testing have the effect of bringing the flow back in line with the Spirit again. Even these off words in the hands of the Spirit come to feed into and compliment the main flow to create this spoken music as the Spirit guides it along. This is the amazing dynamic possible for NT church using the gift of prophecy through all members as each builds up the body through each

member contributing as led by the Spirit to edify the others.

How is weighing/testing implemented? – To implement a test the presider must interrupt the proceedings to reiterate what has been shared – which may have come through several contributions. If necessary, while reiterating/recapping what has been said, he should seek any needed clarification from those that gave the contributions, and then submit it to all the others to affirm anything that resonates with them as from the Lord.

The focus should remain on what God is saying, rather than on trying to spot mistakes, or parts that are of man, or are additional to the message from the Lord. Often a word needs to be tested and divided to identify parts that are from the Lord, and others that may be more from the individual/s that gave it. Typically, though, once members get into a flow of the Spirit there can tend to be a profound accuracy in the flow of what is spoken. However, we should remember to always test all that is contributed and never lapse into assuming what is said is all authentic – i.e., from the Spirit.

When testing, the presider should appeal to all for affirmation of what has been said, or for any to question/query its validity if they are prompted

to do so. Generally, those in the meeting that can affirm what was said should lead the way and pass comment on it as they are guided to do so, though it is open for any that discern they must add to or question the message to speak up at any point.

Having heard all input from all that are led to give it, the presider must look for unity in the whole body on the matter. If there is unity on it, including from the elders, and lastly from himself, he must clearly reiterate what has been said to the church, declaring it to be accepted as a word from the Lord to them. If there is any action to be taken, then that will usually fall into the lap of the leaders.

If there is disagreement or uncertainty from any in the body on the matter in question, the presider must either seek to clarify the matter further to make sure it is properly understood by all, or when he is led to do so he must commit the matter to prayer and fasting by the whole body so it can be raised again at a later date. He can then move on to the next thing the Spirit wants to say through the body.

In the latter instance the presider must repeatedly emphasise to the body that it is important to find the mind of the Lord on every issue. He must specifically encourage those that gave the contributions and brought the matter to

the body, to go personally before the Lord for further personal clarity, and those that were most outspoken against it to similarly question their reservations. He must affirm that those that raised it can raise it again at any time in a later meeting, if and when prompted by the Lord to do so but instruct them to give time for due personal consideration before the Lord before raising it again in the church gathering.

The presider should emphasise the gravity of any issue that comes up and be ready to allocate time according to its gravity, according to his own judgement. This is part of the essential gift of the presider.

In many cases words will be encouragement or instruction that requires no action. These words must nevertheless be tested in the same way to assert they are authentic – meaning they are from the Lord. In this way the whole church grows together towards a unity in their faith as they together learn to hear, discern, and share God's voice.

These prophetic sessions may continue for extended periods, and this is something that once again should be guided by the Spirit. A presider who is sensitive to the Spirit's leading will know how to conduct this flow; when it is time to continue, and when it is time to take a break or

rest. The presider's gift is also something of the Spirit.

This is much like a parent with their children; if there is spare energy, they are ready to guide and direct it into good expression. And when it is time to take a break or rest, they are ready to do that too. However, what we can be sure of is that God is always ready to speak to us when we are ready to listen. I have found this is always true. We are never able to exhaust God, but he is sensitive to our limits and needs, and works within that so what he gives is always restful for us, even when it is dynamic or exciting. A brief mid-session rest is often a good idea before moving on to the next thing the Spirit is raising.

Who may preside? – Any member may be given the opportunity to preside by unanimous agreement from the whole body as the will of the Lord. Generally, any that step forward for the role would do so by nomination from others as guided by the Lord, and under a personal conviction that the Spirit is guiding them to do it.

Those that are encouraged to take the role should generally be recognised by all to be able to accurately hear and discern God's voice. They must be recognised to have the necessary gift of wisdom, especially when dealing with people. They must be humble, servant hearted and teachable.

Preferably having qualities of patience and long suffering. They should always be ready to give the Lord the focus and not seek it for themselves. They should not be overbearing, but able to be firm when the occasion demands it. It is preferable that they know the scriptures reasonably well, and they must be of recognised good character.

They do not have to be an elder, though an elder will often take the role, but there should be other elders present if they do. When a church is new, it has no elders, so no-one takes the role of oversight in this season. If the apostles are still present, they will provide the oversight. If they have left, then there is no oversight for the time being and this will be a formative time where those gifts emerge and are recognised. This may seem radical, but the safety is in the fact that every member has the authority in this model to block anything that is raised if they are doubtful about it. Normally the worst problem they will hit is a stalemate for a time while they try to come into agreement. Of course, the dynamics at these times can be challenging, but the help is there to get them through it, and God will be speaking to them all individually during this time to lead them to resolve differences. In these early stages outside gifts may help them get established by fulfilling the presiding role, but it is important to give opportunities to members until the gifts emerge

and are recognised so they can in eventually be left to function alone – in God’s time. The apostles would never leave until these gifts emerge.

The presider must understand the role of presiding well and be sure of these values and principles of NT church. This means they must be able and ready to step into the role of the servant and the youngest. It is part of the apostolic gift to teach these principles to those that come to preside as they establish churches on the correct footing, and it is the gift of the elders to provide oversight to it.

A gift of encouragement in the presider would usually be very helpful, if not essential.

Multiple presiders – the body must seek to develop multiple members that are able to preside over meetings. Though only one would typically be needed in any given meeting, unless the meeting is lengthy, in which case another may take over to give the other a break as the job can be quite demanding.

Any member may be put forward to fulfil the role, by nomination, as guided from the Lord, and one of the first tasks in a new church is for the body of believers to find agreement on who should be encouraged to take the role. For this to be decided it is vital that the whole body agree, or the new church cannot move forward, or even be

formed. The apostles that are founding the church will be present until this is decided at the very least. In this time, they will model the role of presiding and provide instruction and oversight to members that step forward to take the role.

In a functioning church the body should always seek to put more members forward to fulfil this role, under the guidance of the Lord, so that all the God given gifts for it may emerge and be recognised.

For a new church, by the time the apostolic ministries leave there should be multiple members within the body that are experienced and able to take the role of presiding and are regularly active in the role.

Recognising gifts & ministries – during the normal operation of NT church, various gifts and ministries of the Spirit will emerge in particular members and be recognised by the body. Where such ministries become recognised, the presider should be careful, if necessary, to provide enough additional opportunity to them to use these gifts for the edification of the body. This does not mean there is inequality for any to come forward with any contribution they have, as guided by the Spirit. But gifts and ministries should be acknowledged and given sufficient space to operate. These gifts come to emerge and be recognised in the body by

the body coming to acknowledge the value of their contributions over time. The presider must provide the opportunity for these gifts and give them the appropriate priority, but without excluding others.

The presider should recognise that gifts and ministries wax and wane, and God may at any time choose to speak to the church even through a child. We should recognise that all of us as individuals pass through both times of fruitfulness, and times of pruning. Indeed, a time of fruitfulness, or success in ministry, will often require a season of pruning to follow it. The Spirit takes control of these personal seasons so that when one person is led through a pruning season, others are coming on stream to meet the needs of the church. Therefore, openness should always be maintained for any to participate as the Spirit leads, whilst seeking to accommodate all the gifts and ministries that God is presently using in a greater way.

The voice of God – The presider must constantly affirm that the criteria for every contribution must always be that it is given and prompted from the Lord, and this is the criteria on which all will be judged/weighed/tested.

Responsibility – Without creating unnecessary pressure, the presider must emphasise the responsibility of all in the meeting to seek God's will and, as far as possible, to act in obedience to the Lord as he prompts them by the Spirit. He must also emphasise the responsibility of the whole body to test and affirm whatever God is, or is not saying to the body, and that their word has the power in the NT order to stall or block any decision. All are responsible to do their best to hear the Lord. In this way the body never moves forward on something while divided in their views. The wisdom of this is that the whole body comes to own everything that is accepted or done, rather than it be the preference of some and not others. This demands patience and prayer to bring every member into unity on a matter.

This kind of unity is something that is almost always impossible to achieve in the world, but in the church we all have the same Spirit, who will be saying and affirming the same thing to all, so that unity is there to be found if we look for it. Of course, in the end a decision may come down against what is being considered, but the important thing is that there is unity on it. While all this is in process and there is no unity on it, the matter simply stays on the table.

One problem to consider with this form of church is that at times some of the members of the church may not be present in an assembly when it comes to making a decision. On this there should be a general agreement that whenever the church meets those present have the right to make a decision. That said, there should be enough mutual understanding for members to realise that if one or more of their more intimate friends not present will have an issue with something, they should use their power to seek to delay the decision on their behalf so they can be given the opportunity to be included in what is being considered; in short we should never seek to override the views and beliefs of another by political manoeuvring when they are not present, but do all in our power to make sure they are on board with whatever happens. A key feature of NT church is that all members personally own every decision the body makes.

None of this implies that the leaders of the church are not the decision makers or that they don't have control of the way forward. They too have the opportunity to raise things, and to block things they believe are not of God, just the same as any other member. And if some input does come from a leader, it must be subjected to the very same process of testing by the body. The only difference is that elders are likely to be the people

that are looked up to most by other members, and so they may have more influence. So, on all matters they are the final safety net and backstop when it comes to making good decisions on what God is saying to the church, and on what he is guiding the them to do.

Encouragement – The presider should be able to encourage all to make their contributions, especially new ones, and should be gifted to set all at ease by creating a safe environment, without compromising the principles of NT church meetings.

Preaching & teaching – in NT church all have the freedom to bring a word by preaching/teaching, though this does not generally mean by padded lengthy sermons as they have to respect the desires of others to participate. In every case those bringing such words must be able to assert they believe it is from the Lord, and it is right for them to bring it to the body. The presider should find out what messages are prepared at the beginning of the meeting and seek to order the time to factor them into the meeting without restricting the opportunity for the spontaneous contributions. This may mean deciding on a time limit for each, by agreement with the one who is bringing it, in order not to restrict the opportunity

of others to give. If this agreement cannot be reached, then an opportunity may be agreed for a meeting at a later date. Anything of length that cannot be fitted in without restricting others, could first be assessed publicly for potential value and given priority according to the estimated value.

Eloquence and ability in preaching are not essential, but all that is said must be tested to be a valid word from God.

The principle of openness for Spirit led interjections must always be maintained during such preached messages. The presider should work alongside the preacher to assist in handling this, where members want to contribute during a message. The presider must handle these interjections, and the preacher must give way to them, but in all of this the presider should seek to keep order and keep the meeting flowing throughout. Often there is a temptation to defer such interjections to the end of a preached message, but this is not the NT order. If we do this, then often such moments pass and are lost. The way the NT order works is for any that interject to only do so if they can affirm a prompting of the Spirit to give it, and the interjection must be subjected to the same testing and affirmation as any other word or message. If there are repeated interjections and no affirmation that it is from the Spirit, or in tune with the Spirit, then this reveals a

matter to be handled beyond the meeting, which is a good thing. But in all of this we should never seek to suppress anything or remove the rights of the members.

Control – The presider must always seek to control interjections that are not of the Spirit and become skilled and experienced at doing this. This must be handled in agreement with the body through testing, and not simply on his own judgement. He must remain open for his decisions to also be tested. Generally, elders will keep the performance of the presider under constant review and use the times between meetings to provide pastoral support to him where they guide and correct anything they feel needs adjustment or improvement in the way he uses his gift in the meetings. The presider must therefore have a quality of meekness where he can be taught, though this is generally what we would want of all members, but particularly the one who presides. Elders particularly need to be able to recognise any prejudice or bias in the presider, based on his own views, and help him set them aside when he takes this role.

Safe environment – One value of NT church is that we maintain a safe environment. The presider has a major part in this given that all contributions are

given the freedom to address the body through the direction of the presider. He prevents anyone being put on the spot and makes sure the more nervous member is not directly subjected to anything uncomfortable for them. He is also the first line of defence against anything that is clearly off key in some way, though he must be careful not to rely on his own judgement for things that might be from the Spirit.

Although NT church is free for all, it is not a complete 'free-for-all'. By this we mean everything passes through the presider, and the presider does provide a level of protection for everyone present, backed up by the elders.

There is a fairly well-known case in a church that had a free ethos, where a member struck up the chorus – *He'll be coming round the mountain when he comes...* Everybody heartily joined in as normal for their gathering, but nobody realised what they were singing until they got to the line – *He'll be wearing pink pyjamas when he comes.* Perhaps God gave us the presider to preserve us from embarrassing moments like this. Or maybe we should just be grateful for the laugh and not take ourselves too seriously.

Priority – Where there are many contributions coming forward, the presider must become skilled in allocating the correct priority level to all that is

on offer. This may be done publicly in the meeting at the beginning by requesting a sentence or two that previews any prepared contribution, and an estimate of the time allocation needed to bring it. This should be done together with the whole body so that others can be prompted by the Spirit to request that a higher (or lower) priority be given to any contribution that is offered.

On the matter of prepared contributions, it is often the case that the Spirit will speak to members outside of the meetings, giving them things to deliver to the body. However, it is important to teach the members that there is also a Spirit led time for these things to be contributed, and it can be done spontaneously when the Spirit leads. It is therefore important they understand they should not lever it in against the flow of the Spirit, but they should wait for that lead.

On the whole this is the better way, but there will be times when members come to the meeting with something they feel led to declare from the beginning, in which case the presider will seek to make room for it when he is led to do so. Often, when a member is carrying a word for the church, they must learn to be patient. Sometimes the opportunity does not come at all in a meeting as expected, but in these times, it can be the case that the word they have is still maturing as the Spirit speaks to them further about it, or it is

simply held in reserve by the Spirit ready for the right moment.

If members do make the mistake of pitching in their contribution without being careful to follow the lead of the Spirit, it will often seem to fall flat, like a wrong note in an orchestra. Generally, it will not therefore receive affirmation and the meeting will move on. In this way members learn quickly that the timing of the Spirit is important for everything they do, as much as the word itself.

To encourage this learning, it is a good thing for the principles of being led by the Spirit to be periodically taught by the apostles, and/or the teachers in the church. As the members learn this it will improve the natural flow in the meetings.

Submission – the body must be encouraged to voluntarily submit to the presider to allow him to effectively function in his role. However, all members should always have the freedom to speak or contribute as the Spirit leads them to do so, and this freedom must be protected by all.

Accountability – within the true NT structure of church, accountability is built into the system to provide all the checks and balances needed to keep the church on track and away from error. This takes the form of:

- (a) Freedom for all to speak and contribute, as the Lord leads them.
- (b) Freedom for any to interject at any time, as the Lord leads them.
- (c) The practice of testing everything.
- (d) The demand for unanimity in discerning the Lord's word.
- (e) The practice of prayer and fasting to resolve differences.
- (f) The oversight of elders (if appointed).
- (g) There is no individual leader other than the Lord.
- (h) There is no superiority – all are servants of the rest.
- (i) Scripture for reproof and correction.
- (j) The ministry of apostles that can be called on at any time.

The Typical Meeting

Though the format of a meeting should not be set in stone, there should always be some elements to it to keep it in line with the NT model. The following is offered as a typical format showing the way a meeting may proceed:

1. The presider calls the meeting to order.
2. The presider acknowledges the presence of the Lord and invites others to do so, and to give thanks. He then submits the meeting to the Spirit.
3. The presider then seeks to find out who has prepared contributions – such as teaching and preaching, so that he may be ready to allocate time for them in the meeting whilst leaving sufficient room for spontaneous contributions.
4. The meeting may begin with preliminary worship songs, or this may happen at some other time. *Note: there are times when the prophetic flow will invoke praise and worship and people will want this as a release and response to what God is saying. It is therefore good to remain open to this at any time rather*

than limiting it to a programmed slot. It may serve as a needed moment of rest in the prophetic flow.

5. The presider then invites spontaneous contributions emphasising that all must be done under the guidance of the Spirit. This is treated as the priority over any extended preaching/teaching.
6. When several contributions are given the presider will call for testing, as he is led to do so, by reiterating what is shared, whilst possibly seeking clarification from the contributors and then inviting responses – at all times emphasising that all must always listen and respond to the leading of the Spirit.
7. Once all have spoken, he must seek unity on the validity of what is shared as a word from the Lord. If accepted, he then reiterates what is given and declares it to be God's word. If there is no unity it is committed to prayer and fasting to be raised again at a later date.
8. The process of inviting contributions (see 5) is repeated as the Spirit leads. This cycle may continue for some time, as the Spirit leads.

9. When judged appropriate, the prepared contributions are invited, but openness for interjection always remains. Alternatively, prepared contributions may be brought earlier if their priority is discerned to demand it, but not in exclusion to the spontaneous open sessions.

10. The meeting is called to a close according to time and the leading of the Spirit. The presider may conclude by reiterating anything that has been accepted as the mind of the Lord, and any issues that are still to be resolved. Then finally by prayer.

Between meetings much discussion is likely to take place in the smaller groups or circles, on what has happened in these main meetings. Elders/Pastors will also follow up between meetings with people who have shared anything or show signs of doing so. All this coaching behind the scenes is designed to make the NT meetings work and flow well, with as many gifts and ministries as possible active and making use of the freedom they have to contribute.

The Role and Position of Leaders

We are now able to define (i.e. recover the original definition of) the role and position of leaders in the context of the true original NT model of church. What emerges is that there is always a plurality of leadership roles and positions taking a wide variety of forms. This includes Elders and Deacons, and also the five-fold ministries of Apostles, Prophets, Pastors (shepherds), Evangelists and Teachers, and finally the Presider who may also be any or none of these. All of these are serving roles and there is no single position of leader – other than that of the Lord Jesus who is, and remains, the Head.

Alongside all this there is a special gift of leadership where a member is used by the Spirit to direct the church in some way. All in the body are in fact seeking to follow the voice of the Spirit. Some of the things that are given will offer a lead to the church, giving them a suggestion of some kind of direction. Any member may be used by the Spirit to give such a lead – this is a leadership gift, but they only do so by speaking the words of the Spirit in a way that the body recognises them to be from him. Only in this way does this leadership work, and never by imposition. The one who steps forward to give a lead of some kind always does

so as the youngest among siblings. Their voice only carries authority as the rest recognise him to be delivering words and directions that come from the Spirit – which is something that every member should recognise.

With this form and freedom of leadership the NT model of church provides all the checks and balances required to prevent any individual from seizing a dominant role where they impose their own word and will on the church. This matter of God giving a lead to the church through whoever he chooses is therefore important. Of course, a recognised leader can be the one to bring such a word, as for anyone else, but it is not his exclusive preserve as is often the case in modern church. Any such word that is brought will be weighed and tested as for anything else, and if it is something directional then it will no doubt be given extra scrutiny to be sure all agree. Of course, under this NT order a recognised leader or any member may block such a word, so once again it requires the whole body to be on board with it to be accepted, which is especially important for directional leads, and this is what makes it safe.

These checks and balances are needed because there is always the threat of incursion of some worldly dominance if it is permitted. One of the main reasons both the historical and modern

church has run into trouble is that it has come to advocate precisely this kind of dominance. However, the scriptures always represent these incursions in a negative light, and as a threat to the proper functioning of the body.

If a dominant role is accepted, then this naturally forms a higher tier of leadership. This then often naturally leads to further tiers developing which then become a hierarchy. The single leader model therefore tends to become the thin end of the wedge that naturally degrades to a worldly system of government.

In practice the single leader models of modern church can function to some extent, depending how the leader exercises that authority, but its success is mostly dependent on the nobility of the leader and their readiness to hold to the other principles of the NT model. This is seen to be the case in the Kings of Israel, compared to the former days of Judges when God was able to raise up leaders as required from any quarter.

Directive leadership is always given as a gift to the NT church. The structure of the body is such that these gifts should be able to emerge from anywhere at any time as they are recognised by the body to be offering a valid lead and initiative that is the voice and mind of God, and it will often

come from members other than the Elders and Deacons who are there to oversee it.

In a church with a single leader, it can only possibly approach the effectiveness of the NT model if the leader becomes a kind of protector of the freedom of the whole body, rather than giving himself any kind of priority other than that of oversight of that freedom. Unfortunately, it has been proved that power does eventually corrupt, even in the church setting, which should not be too surprising as it is not the model that has been passed on to us in the scriptures. It is therefore better to have a structure that does not vary from that NT model, which means there is no single overarching leader.

The reason the NT church has no need for a single leader is that all the necessary checks and balances exist within the NT structure as we have explained it. Even the most insignificant person is empowered to protect it. The reality is, a single leader would in fact unbalance that structure and introduce vulnerabilities that should not be there. And in most cases, it will go wrong in time, like the kings of Israel. We, the church, already have a King, and a Head, so none should seek to displace him. Rather, we should all seek to protect the true order so the Lord can continue to operate as the head of the body, according to the scriptures.

The Five-Fold Ministries?

The apostle Paul wrote that the five-fold ministries are for the equipping of the body so they can ALL serve each other and build each other up (Eph 4:11-13). All of these ministries may arise and be recognised within the body. Here is how they should work in the NT model of church:

Apostles – Plants churches on the New Testament principles of freedom where the freedom of all is protected and all are enabled to serve each other and build each other up. First and foremost, this freedom is the spoken word that comes from each person to the rest of the body, but there are many other ways of serving using all the gifts of the Spirit. Apostles also bring special messages when God sends them to lead the church on, or to stimulate new growth, and they return to correct the deviations of the church when they stray off this path in some way. And especially when they deviate from this NT order.

Prophets – Prophets prophesy, often pointing the way forward with special prophetic insight. However, the main service of the Prophet is to enable all members of the body to prophesy to each other in order to edify and build each other

up. This is simply speaking accurately with the words and revelations of God as they are led by the Spirit. A high proportion of prophecy is encouragement. Beyond that there is exhortation. All of this comes from all members of the body, and it is tested by all to find unanimous agreement that it is sourced in God, and accurate, as each hear God's voice. The main work of a prophet will therefore be to release all members to discover their prophetic gifting according to the words of Joel (Joel 2:28) as he was looking forward to the days of the Spirit that we are now in.

Pastors – They care for the flock, but this is primarily a ministry to the body that takes place in the background to meetings where they coach, encourage and instruct the members to become active with their gifts and services to the body so they can build each other up. Their job is to prepare people to build each other up in their faith, so the members are led by the pastors to a place where they can effectively share what they have and be used by the Holy Spirit for that purpose. Of course, all member can both give and receive messages through the work of the Spirit in the gatherings, so the pastoral ministries will help members to fully process any words they receive from the Lord when they gather. At times, when giving words, members will launch out but find

their words fall flat in the church and receive no affirmation. In these cases, those with pastoral gifts will support and encourage them, and help them to try again until they find their way to accurately hear and deliver what God is giving them for the body. Pastors therefore need to be kind, patient and loving with the flock to lead them to be effective in their ministry, and to help them process anything they receive.

Evangelists – Of course evangelists lead people to faith in Christ, but their main task is to enable the whole body to evangelise effectively. They therefore often lead the way in this with strategies given by the Holy Spirit, encouraging the body, training them, preparing them, and providing opportunities for them to share their faith.

Teachers – There is a clear need for knowledge that is fulfilled by teachers that put the faith of members on a good footing and enables the body to be more effective in their ministry to each other. If people increase in knowledge of the things of God, then this in turn gives them more to share with each other as the Holy Spirit directs. The point is: knowledge is something that is shared by the body as they grow towards unity in faith. Teachers add many thoughts and ideas that can be worked through together in this process. The

principles of original NT church also need to be taught so members are clear on their opportunities and responsibilities to serve God in these gatherings. Teaching should therefore seek to activate members, and never to displace that activity as has happened in modern churches. Teaching should also only be given where God has specifically given something that the church needs to hear. If this requires more time to be delivered then it should be allocated, but not at the expense of the interactive body ministry where all are free to speak to each other. Teaching should also always remain open for interjection, as for anything else, with the support of the presider to deal with anything that comes up. Where interjections are made the teacher should give way to let the presider handle it.

SUMMARY: The point of all this five-fold ministry is to enable the whole body to be effective in its various forms of service to each other. It is not to take over from the body and make themselves the focus as has often happened in modern church. They are servants of the body. What they should be offering to the body is a service that equips and activates all, guiding them to be as effective as they can be for each other. Only when the whole body becomes active in building each other up, especially with the spoken gifts, are the five-

fold ministries successful in their work. On the other hand, if they instead take over and displace the mutual ministry of the whole body, such that the body becomes inactive, they have done the exact opposite to the thing that is their true purpose and commission.

COMMENTS: What we see here is not only does the church build each other up, but within the church are the five-fold ministries designed to equip the people to build each other up. These ministries may emerge and become recognised in any of the members, including Elders and Deacons. They may also come in from other churches, as God directs. It is really God that takes control of providing what we need. We just need to be able to recognise it and accept it when it arrives. The huge mistake that has been made with these ministries in modern church is that they have taken over and become an end in themselves, rather than as a means to an end, which is to equip all the members to serve each other. They have taken over having sought to be the ones who do the actual building and failed by forcing the members into inactivity. It is therefore vital that the input of these ministries never displace the spontaneous contributions of the whole body, so if they have extended teaching or instruction to

give, it must not normally be in the main church meeting sessions.

In the early church the meeting environment was so dynamic they were always ready and keen to meet. The modern church, by contrast, has had to reduce the schedule to the level that people can bear given its lack of dynamism. The special input of the five-fold ministries would therefore often take place behind the scenes or as additional meetings to that of the main church gathering, where extended teaching and instruction would be perfectly appropriate. However, what has happened in the modern church is that the main meetings have been taken over by this kind of ministry, which ironically almost completely displaces the very need for it given that those that receive it never get the opportunity to exercise the things it has been equipped with, except perhaps in a very token measure.

Transitioning Modern Church to Original NT Church

In many ways it would be easier and better to apply the NT model of church to new believers, in new church plants, that know nothing of the modern church structure and order. This way the NT model culture will be developed from the beginning. That, of course, would be an ideal.

There are many in the modern church that have been raised in it, and spent many years in it, so it is all they know. People tend to have a natural intransigence and a tendency to stick with the familiar, or just follow the crowd. Jesus didn't call us sheep for nothing. God often sends prophetic gifts to the church to get us out of our malaise, though they are not always listened to, and modern church often tends to exclude the prophetic from any opportunity to deliver such a message, so they may never be heard.

For many people in modern church, there will be resistance to the changes needed to transition to NT church though God never imposes these things on us. Though he speaks to us about his path he nevertheless allows us to choose our own and take the consequences of our choices. This means, in many cases, the only way forward may be to regroup with those that are ready to do

the new thing – something that is always painful, but sometimes necessary for the church to move forward.

Rediscovering original NT church is not a trivial matter. It may be the stuff of life and death for many in our community who need to see a better form of church than they have seen so far. So the call to it may be strong. We therefore have to make these difficult decisions about the way forward. What is certain is that God will not deny those that pray and long for a better expression of church, the chance to engage in it once it begins to happen. There are many Christians in modern church that are in this bracket, even if they are not clear on what it is they are looking for, and therefore continue with modern church believing it is the best they have on offer.

In some cases, it is conceivable that the whole of a modern church gets the vision for transitioning to original NT church, if they are listening to the Spirit. Here the members will encounter some specific problems relating to the long-term conditioning they have had in modern church and breaking out of that will require a real paradigm shift. The same is true for newly formed churches under the NT model where members came from modern church settings. Clearly one thing would be helpful, which is that they have all researched

the new NT model, and they understand and accept it. But even for those that join the new church this will not always be the case. So, the question is: How do we effectively make the transition so all members begin to operate under the freedom of the new model?

There is a real challenge here because, though we may not realise it, modern church has often only kept many of a certain type of person. That is the type that will attend and endure a setting where they are forced to be inactive for long periods. For many who were raised in modern church, this is part of their upbringing and training. For strangers to church, coming into the modern church and adapting to it has always proved difficult unless they are of a certain type of personality. What I am saying is, modern church has not been able to attract and keep many that are feistier and more outspoken. These have just not fitted in, so they didn't stay. What we ended up with therefore is those that would accept the modern church way, and if we are transitioning a church to the NT model, we may find it is these kinds of people we are beginning our new church with, which does offer the opportunity for more outspokenness. In many ways it is the personality types that we have for a long time been filtered out of modern church that we need more in the NT church. At the same time, we need those that

have been conditioned to be quiet to step up and take a more active role. It will be necessary that they understand they are empowered as much as anyone else in the NT church, and that they use that responsibility as the church needs them to. To get long time churchgoers to respond in this way is a significant challenge. How can this be achieved?

First – what we need first is to set up the church with the key roles in place. This means a suitable venue with numbers not too great so they can all be heard, and with enough people to form a real body. Then a presider is needed who understands the proper role, is gifted to take it, and has the sanction of the rest to do it. We then need enough people present who understand the NT model and are ready to participate by using the freedom they have in the new model.

Second – we need to teach the whole concept of the original NT church order to all members. Not all people read or are able to absorb ideas of this kind by reading, so it needs to be explained – i.e., taught – which leads us to an irony; we have so far railed against the model of modern church where people are taught but kept inactive, and now we are proposing to teach again.

This is where we need to model the difference right from the beginning. That means we need someone to deliver the teaching in the new way under the authority of the presider, ready at any time to 'give way' as required by the presider. We then need a number of people in the gathering that understand the new model and are ready and willing to be led by the Spirit to give interjections as they are led to do so. Maybe six or more people present would be a good number to start with. When interjections from them happen, the one who is teaching will give way to the interjection under the leadership of the presider, ready to return to the message once the interjection is over. The presider will manage the interjection by allowing others to add their comments, emphasising that if anyone speaks, they should try to do it as the Spirit leads them. He should then seek affirmation on what has been said – i.e., test it, and accept it if all those present are able to affirm it. The presider should be clear with the whole church that they are involved in this testing and affirmation, and they are free to speak if they have something to say about it. In this way the freedom for interjection is modelled to the new church right from the beginning and the presider should make sure that everyone knows what is happening; that this is the way the new NT model of church is expected to function.

Seeing the new order in action is an important key for establishing it and transitioning to the new model. At the beginning it will be particularly important that the presider repeatedly emphasises the freedom all members have to participate in this process, and he will encourage them to do so.

We must be clear with all present that those who are using this new freedom are modelling the freedom that all members have, and that if any that are present are prompted by the Spirit, they should feel free to respond or participate. At the same time, we should never push members to contribute. Rather we should wait as long as it takes for them to step in under the leading of the Spirit. The responsibility of the leaders is simply to keep this door open for them, and to encourage them, but not to pressure them. Our prompting, to force the matter, would only become a fake substitute for the leading of the Spirit, so it is important that we don't go there, as a matter of principle. The Spirit is perfectly able to give strong promptings to even the most timid members, if they have an opportunity to respond to it. The leaders of the group should believe this and learn to rely on it.

There have been times that I have been in churches where the freedom for the prophetic was

controlled or shut down. I remember in such a church a member joining us that I discerned was accustomed to using the gift of prophecy, but they had never used it in this place. I asked them if this was so, which they confirmed, and I asked why they had not used it. They simply said they never had a prompting to use it.

This is a remarkable thing – where we develop an environment that the Spirit is not free to move, he will never force his way in. It is up to us to give him the freedom and then we will suddenly find he responds to us in it. It comes within the same bracket as ‘draw near to me, and I will draw near to you’, but in this case on the church level rather than the individual level.

So, what we are saying is that it takes a few people to model the proper operation of NT church in the presence of the rest to encourage the whole church to learn the new order and follow their lead. This means the whole process of testing must also take place, and in this it must be made clear that a word must be received by all present for it to be accepted. So in terms of the testing, all are inescapably involved, even if they say nothing.

This freedom to participate in the testing should always be emphasised so the presider is always sure everybody present understands it, and that all understand the objective in all of it is to

hear God accurately. We should be clear that where words that are given receive affirmation from others, these words will be accepted provided none express disagreement or uncertainty about it. There may be some that never step up to be either positive or negative in this environment, but it must be emphasised that if they don't block something they disagree with, or are not confident about, then it has to be taken that they are in agreement, and the presider should always be clear that all are party to the decision. The presider should always encourage those that have some disagreement to at least simply flag it up, even if they don't elaborate on it or say anything. The matter will then be shelved for a while. Such a matter can then be followed up with the member by elders to find the root of their issue outside of the meeting setting. In this way the importance of all members functioning together becomes a principle that all respect and work towards; we maintain a safe environment; and even the most timid members get to participate in every decision.

To summarise this: if we are to effectively transition from the modern church model to the original NT model, we have to both teach it and demonstrate it. Once members understand it and have experienced and accepted it, they will all

become protectors of it so it cannot revert again or be corrupted. It requires patience and humility from the leaders for the new model to take root, but God is emphatically behind this so he will do everything to help us succeed. After all, what we are doing in the end is giving him full freedom in our gatherings to work in the way he wants to work.

The leaders should continue to teach the principles of the new model until all members are clear on it, and the model is actively working, becoming the new basis of all church meetings. Even after the church becomes accustomed to the new model there will be new members joining so it is important to periodically share the values of church, so the new ones realise that they too are empowered to participate, and for the presider to repeatedly encourage people to use their freedom, but without pressuring them. This will be particularly important if the new members have a background that is familiar with modern church ways. Once the new church culture is established this becomes less critical, but in the early stages it will be essential.

Third – One important aspect of the NT church model is the freedom for outside members to come in and participate. The members should be

encouraged to spread the word on this so it is clear to those outside the church that this is not a closed fellowship, and they are welcome to come and participate so long as they can accept the new protocol of testing all things, including any contribution they make, as the scriptures direct us to do.

Of course, in modern church there has not been much crossflow of members. Rather, each church has tried to encourage their own members just to stick to the church they belong to.

This has changed for the better in recent times due to the emerging technology of the internet where all people are easily able to look in on what other churches get up to. However, there is still not much freedom for outsiders coming into modern church gatherings and participating. The original NT church was much more open to travelling members, and to a flow from other church groups. This was always a stimulating thing in churches and the Holy Spirit would use that freedom to form a greater unity between the different church groups. It is therefore important that this principle must be modelled from the start, even though it will present a significant challenge. What should soon be realised is that the new model is able to handle that challenge safely, given the principle of publicly testing everything that is brought to the church. Even

where outside input is not accepted to be of God, the process of testing and discerning the matter will still be a positive learning curve for all members. If there is disagreement on what is brought, this is still not a problem. The matter is heard and shelved whilst the members each take it personally before the Lord to get clarity on it through prayer and fasting. The matter will not be passed in the assembly until all agree, so none of this input poses a real threat even if it turns out not to be God speaking.

One thing we must be prepared for in transitioning a church, or raising a new church based on the NT model, is a period where the learning curve is steep, and many mistakes are made. This is normal. It takes time to gain experience. This may mean for a while many words are not accepted or validated as people err on the side of caution, which is the best way because when an authentic word does come it will have a strong resonance that will be very clear to all and this will become the benchmark experience for all that follows.

In many ways a new church begins like a band tuning up. There are many discordant sounds that are not orchestrated and don't hang together. However, once the Spirit takes hold of this kind of gathering as its conductor, the

members will quickly begin to recognise the music of the Spirit in the spoken words that we described earlier. In this way the prophetic gifting of all members will be discovered and released so the experience of NT church begins to flow. What is important is that we are patient with our fellow believers in this period of learning until we learn to flow in the Spirit in the same way the early church did. We then stand to discover just what we have been missing for such a long time.

For existing leaders, it is essential they must step down from the single leader model to put themselves on an equal level with the rest. However, once this kind of church gets started it will be realised there is a whole new area of ministry for those existing leaders that have a genuine pastoral gift. That is to use their gift to encourage their members to become active in the new order of church.

They are of course released from the burden of the weekly sermon because the body will now minister to itself. They can still participate in that body ministry of course, but only as an equal, and they must make sure their own contributions are tested as are the words of anyone else. This means the burden of care shifts for them into the true five-fold ministries that are there to equip the church so they can effectively

minister to each other. The step down will take humility, but what these ministers will discover if they do this is the true purpose of their gift, which I think in the end they will realise is far more fulfilling than the role they have been trying to fulfil as a single leader. At the same time, it is important for them to realise there will be other five-fold ministry gifts in the body that are there to be discovered and released, so even this burden of care does not fall to them only, but to the whole body, as for everything else.

Conclusion

The church structures and order we see today in the modern church has strayed far from the original model we see in the scriptures. This is true across the board for the Christian church.

When we look closely at this history, and the journey the church has taken, we can see some of the reasons why it has become what it is. Behind it there is a huge battle going on that includes 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' who have conspired to nullify the church and defeat its mission to the world. For a long time this opposition has to some degree been effective, but these diabolical enemies of the Kingdom of God are always fearful that the early church model will be rediscovered, because they know it will be even more powerful and effective than it was in the early church. What we now have is a history and legacy of those failings. Enough to make us want to look for better, and to rediscover the power of true church. Of course, there will be determined resistance, and not just from evil powers. There are many with a vested interest in keeping church as it is. Among them there are many that will see this model as a threat, and they will therefore oppose it.

What we should be certain of, however, is that sooner or later God will have his way. That can be in our generation, or it may be a later one, but it will come. In terms of what has happened with the church in the past, we should not be too grieved. It has proved to be God's usual way to let man try his own way first before being persuaded to turn back to God and do it his way.

This history of the church is helpful to us because we now fully understand what it means to stray from the true model. The worldly power structures of church have, over history, been shown at times in their full ugliness. In others it simply manifests in passivity and luke-warmness. But all is not lost. In our day at least a third of the people that ever lived are alive right now. It seems that God still intends a vast proportion of humanity to see the church in her full glory in these latter days. It has been seen in miniature already in the early church, and it is this that points the way forward for us so we know it is there to be had. How incredibly exciting it is to think this will be rediscovered in a day when there are more than twenty times the population on earth as there were back then, and now all can be easily reached with the message in a way that was never possible back then.

In presenting this message of the principles of early church, I am offering something I am

convinced came to me from God. It is his will, and it is his desire for us because he is a good Father, and his view is that his children deserve the best.

None of us, myself included, fully know what this will be like, or what it will mean for the world. Only part of my insight comes from experience; the rest is a prophetic insight I am presenting here. What we can expect is challenges, and we can expect surprises. We also expect opposition, but we expect victory. I have no doubt there have been many that have prayed and interceded for this over many years, agonising over the failings of the church – its luke-warmness, its passivity, including many that have passed without them seeing the revival in their day, or even knowing what that looks like. At times there have been remarkable outbreaks of power, reminding us there is more to be had, and no doubt heartening those that were actively looking and praying for it. Generally, those revivals have sooner or later petered out. Usually, I believe because we then tried to contain it in the manmade church order and structure we have developed. But a new day is coming, and for some it is here now. The first thing is for this message to be absorbed and then taken before the Lord for him to affirm it and embed it in our heart and spirit so a deep groaning for it will arise to God,

asking him to do it in our day. It is the Habakkuk prophecy and prayer:

Prophecy:

For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.

(Habakkuk 2:3)

Prayer:

Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known;

(Habakkuk 3:2)

What I am sure of is that we can be the ones who see this happen. We have the opportunity to delight the God we love by being obedient to the vision and embracing what he always had for us. Remarkably he is waiting for us to release him again in our gatherings. It can be rediscovered in our generation, and I am certain once it begins to emerge there will be no stopping it. News travels fast in our modern world. Come on my friends, my brothers and sisters. Now we know what to do, let's not dally around in the way we do church any

longer. We have waited long enough. Let's do it for him. Let's make him smile. Let's delight him by allowing him to delight us with everything he intended for us all along. Let's see the church of these last days arise and become everything and more that it proved to be in its early days.

GOD BLESS.

TREVOR MADDISON

Biblical Gifts, Ministries, Roles & Activities

Contributions in the church²⁴

- Hymn/Song
- Psalm
- Word of instruction
- Revelation
- Tongue - gift
- Interpretation - gift
- Prophecy - gift
- Word of knowledge - gift
- Word of wisdom - gift
- Word of faith - gift
- Healing - gift
- Miracle - gift
- Discerning of spirits – gift
- Teaching
- Preaching
- Encouragement
- Thanksgiving
- Correction/Rebuke
- Scripture
- Prayer

Ministry gifts²⁵

- Encouraging
- Giving
- Leadership

²⁴ 1 Cor 14:26, 12:7-11

²⁵ Rom 12:6-8 1 Cor 12:28

- Government
- Showing mercy
- Serving
- Teaching
- Helps
- Administration

Regional/Global Church roles²⁶

- Apostle
- Prophet
- Pastor
- Evangelist
- Teacher

Local church roles

- Elder/Overseer
- Deacon

Use of Scripture²⁷

- Teaching
- Rebuking
- Correcting
- Training in righteousness

Practices of the church

- Communion
- Prayer – corporate
- Baptism
- Evangelism

²⁶ Eph 4:11 1 Cor 12:28

²⁷ 2 Tim 3:16

- Deliverance

Prayer

- Worship
- Thanksgiving
- Devotion
- Intercession
- Petition
- Warfare