



The Gospel of Necessity

PROLOGUE – Regarding Church Government

originally written in 1974

Dear Brethren,

It is my concern that the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the five - fold or mobile ministry and the local church elders be explored

“Solid food is for full grown men, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.” (Heb. 5:14)

I was driving by a library one day and was impressed by the Spirit to stop. I went in and Gibbon’s “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire” leaped out at me. I knew the Lord was telling me to study the relationship between the Roman Empire and the Church of Jesus Christ. My findings are a part of this study as they directly relate to the government of the Church. I also read “The Book of the Ancient Romans” by Dorothy Mills. I found great parallels between Rome and the United States, which I only touch on in this study.

It is my understanding that God is sovereign through the Holy Spirit. Denominational headquarters is not sovereign; the local church is not sovereign nor are those with exceptional ministry gifts. The Lord brings about circumstances that change the course of history. He accomplishes His purpose through the Church. A day with the Lord is like a thousand years. (2nd Peter 3:8) Man’s disobedience does not alter His design.

I believe the scriptures indicate the best church government is the local government. Except for necessity, government stayed in the local church until men conceived the ecclesiastical church.

What God wants is our whole man. He wants our heart as well as our minds. As centralized government increases, the ability of genuine love to flow decreases. Centralized government brings with it the inevitable concern for position. I believe the Lord would like to keep us brothers, each with his gift to give, not his position to receive and protect.

The Lord used apostolic ministry to establish the Church. Before the New Testament was written, the Word had to come in person and in letters from the apostles and prophets. This function has not altered. We are living epistles and the Word must still come in and through us. But the authority of the New Testament is now established. It is complete. There is nothing to add or subtract from the Revelation of Christ through the Holy Bible. The apostles today therefore need not to add to the scriptures. Their job, I believe, is to uncover the mystery of Christ; to so establish the Church that she lives and breathes the gospel; to draw out the mobile ministry that the Church can be properly equipped, so that together

“We all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we may be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles or error, but speaking the Truth in love, may grow up in all things unto Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:13-16)

NECESSITY AND THE GOOD NEWS

“Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly; and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband that, I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.” (2nd Cor. 11:1-3)

As I study the history of the New Testament Church, it appears the hardest thing to walk in and maintain is the simplicity of the good news. Revealing Christ is the mission entrusted to the Church. The conviction that brings belief is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection of every believer the consummating ministry of our Lord. Our work is by faith, to cause the world to see Christ. (John 6:29,39&40)

The early church responded to this challenge by demonstrating the power of God to their generation. The preaching of the gospel was the source of that power. (1st Cor. 2:4-5) Government became a skeleton through which the body could stand erect, but Christ's bride could only live through God's breath. (Ez. 37)

The form that the Spirit chose to reveal Christ was that of necessity. The physical situation and the spiritual purpose met and gave birth to the event. For example, when 3,000 were saved in one day the necessity became to hold all things in common. (Acts 2) This did not then become New Testament law, but a vital and necessary provision for the life of God to be uncovered.

There is no indication that this became the pattern for all or any other local church. The work of the Holy Spirit expressed through the apostles took on different qualities in different locations, due in part to the location and in part to the apostles. For example, we find a gospel requiring circumcision amongst the Jewish brethren and of course the gospel of the uncircumcision to the gentiles, which we embrace. (Gal. 2:1-10)

The variety in quality, challenge, and temptation of each local assembly is clearly seen in Paul's letter to the Corinthians versus his epistle to the Galatians and more graphically expressed in our Lord's charges to the seven churches in the Revelation. They were similar in calling and accountability, but different in expression, correction, and reward. (Rev. chapt. 1-3)

The uniqueness yet similarity of God's plan is clearly seen as you prune pear trees. No two pear trees grow exactly alike and some, because of the course of nature or the negligence of man, require greater care than others. The basic principles of pruning them are the same from tree to tree. Horizontal growth should be encouraged and vertical growth of the branches minimized. Yet necessity determines the amount and type of pruning the particular tree needs. The end result of the correct principles being applied is similar high quality fruit in all the trees; fruit that is desirable for the men of this world to eat.

The Church derives a wonderful strength from this understanding being applied. Our horizontal knitting increases while in the vertical our glory is not in men, but our confidence is in the vine. "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Appollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's. (1 Cor. 3:21-22)

The great similarity we share is the call of God to reveal Christ. The method and emphasis may vary, but the purpose must remain the same.

The government that holds the Church together is a monarchy. Its king is Christ. It's earthly expression the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals to us the mind of Christ. (John 16:7-15) The special ability to transmit that mind was entrusted to the apostles who passed it to the elders who passed it to the Church out of whom came more apostles who then began the sequence again. Thus, what is transmitted, the message is important. The messenger becomes its servant. And those with the greatest revelation of our Lord must become the least in earthly wisdom to transmit it. (2 Cor. 12) The object being, that the kingdom be revealed in the hearts of men.

The great work of government is that it brings peace and order out of chaos and confusion. It is the administrator of the affairs of men and the arbitrator of his disputes. The exciting thing about the early church is that she had a purpose, and all differences were settled on the basis of what best communicated the work of our Lord. (John 6:40) Amongst the apostles and elders the concern was for the spread of the gospel and that as few hindrances as possible be put in the way of it's advance. This is made clear by the decision of the apostles and elders in Acts 15:28. "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." (It is good to read the entire chapter to observe the New Testament government at work under the lordship of the Holy Spirit.)

The apostles in Jerusalem did not have uncovered to them the revelation that came to Paul for the gentiles until necessity revealed it to them. Once they saw it, they gave their whole-hearted assent. No master plan was drawn for the government of those believers. They left it to the Holy Spirit and anointed ministers to meet the need as the situation presented itself.

After the decision expressed by the apostle James (Acts 15), the prophets Judas and Silas were sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to confirm Paul and Barnabas in their ministry and the revelation given to them. Upon delivering the letter and the spoken word, Judas returned to the apostles while Silas was "pleased to abide there still". The ensuing unforeseen dispute between Paul and Barnabas over Mark caused Barnabas to go his way with Mark, and Paul to take Silas as his traveling companion. Necessity changed the ministry. The message stayed the same. Silas now related to Paul and the brethren at Antioch as well as the apostles in Jerusalem. Judas brought a part of the heart of God, expressed in Antioch, back to Jerusalem. Thus the Church was knit together in unity without the help of an earthly organization and the mobile ministry functioned at the direction of the Holy Spirit to connect the local churches.

Paul and Barnabas related to and were sent out from the Church in Antioch. Apart from necessity there is no evidence that the mobile ministry (the apostles, prophets, and teachers) of these two assemblies met on any legislative preplanned basis or organized a structure external to the local church to which they submitted. It is good to note that Barnabas found Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch. There they functioned together in the teaching and prophetic ministry, training and being trained in the local church, until circumstance and maturity birthed them by the spirit to their apostolic call.

As Paul and Barnabas preached Christ, the Holy Spirit brought conviction, disciples were born and local churches established. Those churches did not become a part of the church at Antioch nor did Paul and Barnabas stay to govern those disciples. They ordained elders to shepherd the work while they continued to reveal the special message elsewhere, the mystery hidden for ages. The Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas moved on. The Holy Spirit and elders remained.

As the Church grew it became necessary to instruct the infant. God raised up prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers who in relation to the apostles and elders ministered at the direction of the Holy Spirit. Both Paul and Apollos were mightily used of God on the same works, but no structure (beyond the local church) directed their movement. Their place of ministry was determined by the need ([1st Cor. 16:12](#), [Titus 3:13](#)) and their relationships, mutual adoration of the Lord Jesus Christ, and their glory was in God.

The assembly in the given locale met the financial needs of the ministry. When one local church had a need beyond what it could meet, the need was communicated in the Holy Spirit through the mobile ministry. The famine in Judea ([Acts 11:27-30](#)) is a good example of this. The need was revealed through the Prophet Agabus in the office of foretelling events by the Holy Spirit to the saints in Antioch. As he revealed the oracle, "the disciples, every man accord to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judea." Thus the necessity created the response. But once met no alternative structure was created, no system.

All this took place against the backdrop of the Roman Empire, which became the most extensive governmental structure in the history of man. It brought with it the exaltation of the paternal family, the fields and the state. The Romans took great pride in the state, and its influence finally encompassed the family and the field. The whole emphasis switched from an agrarian to a cosmopolitan society. The love of pleasure replaced the spirit of discipline and self-denial. The individual good replaced the general welfare and men vied for personal power, eventually declaring themselves to be god. It was into this atmosphere the gospel was first preached. The church had to contend with men who knew well the overriding principles of centralized government and had learned that, "all roads must lead to Rome". Their pledge of allegiance is very reminiscent of our commitment to the Universal body of Christ. One can substitute the heavenly Jerusalem for Rome. "I will never deny my allegiance to my native town. Only I will never forget that Rome is my fatherland and that my native town is just a portion of Rome."

All around it, the gentile church was facing the slow deterioration of authority, self-restraint, and good order. Slave labor replaced the small landowner. Money began to buy political office, a professional army was created to whom the power passed, great sports events captured the peoples eye, a great increase in education prevailed, women became concerned about their rights, and taxes increased to support the pleasure seeking government. If all this sounds familiar, it is because history is given to instruct us.

(1 Cor.10: 11, Ecc.1: 9-10)

What interests me is that the Romans conquered and absorbed the Jewish nation, but the seed of that nation, Christ, absorbed the Roman Empire. Subsequently, the Church swallowed up the state only to see the state devour the Church.

Up to 100 years after the death of the apostle John, the Church seems to have functioned only on the basis already described. As the gospel conquered it's conqueror through suffering, and the evidence of transformed lives, it revealed a moral fiber the world desperately needed. The fullness of the time had come, and the world was ripe for the principles of the gospel.

By the end of the second century however, the gentiles had brought into the church their fascination and knowledge of government and of course the subtlety of the human heart when it gives itself to revelation beyond the confines of God's Word. Perhaps it was thoughts of the glory of Solomon or the training of the imperial system. Whatever it was, that complete transformation of character that typified the early church began to wane. Like the Roman Empire, many frontiers had been conquered and now the Church began to look inward at its structure.

The process of decay began by the incorrect use of the mobile ministry. Around 300 AD meetings called synods were called at which each local church was to be represented. Instead of sending a mobile representative as in Acts 15, the local assemblies elected bishops to represent them as the ecclesiastical head of the Church. Each local church became an episcopal government led by the ecclesiastical governor. The bishop gained increasing power as the church lost its simplicity and love of Christ. Like their worldly counterpart, men began to vie for office and position. The liberty of the Holy Spirit was replaced by ritual and ceremony as the veil was again drawn over the revelation of Christ. The bishops became the authority. They had no one to correct them but other men who had made the same compromise. Finally with the election of archbishops, the final preparation to the headship of man was completed and the mystery of Godliness was hidden from the world. The church became the Harlot she so much despised in the first century. She perpetuated the traditions of the Babylonian and Egyptian priesthood's and re-erected the clergy-laity relationship of the Levitical Priesthood. The church became part of the state and an extension of the political aims of those who hungered after power.

This all began with the taking of worldly concepts of government into the church and "not holding fast to the head from whom all the body being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands increases with the increase of God."

(Col.2: 19)

CONCLUSION

It is the quality of freedom that allows the Spirit of Grace to function and reveals Jesus to the world. It is our duty to add as little as possible of our work and government to His. We are to be increasingly dependent upon the Holy Spirit as he instructs through God ordained circumstance. The point at which the second century church went wrong was taking the administrative authority of the church out of the hands of local elders and creating a body external to the local church. That eventually became the ruler of the local church. The final step, of course, was the office of Pope with the College of Cardinals, which oversee the bishops, which oversee priests, etc. This is much like the origin of the Roman Empire where the Pontus Maximus ruled over the College of Augurs and the priests and pontiffs.

As the church slowly left the work of Calvary and our Lord's resurrection, all the trappings of paganism came upon her. Instead of dressing in white linen, she decked herself in purple and said, "I am a queen". The Holy Spirit left the ecclesiastical system to function on it's own, but continued with every believer who believed in the simplicity, which is in Christ Jesus.

This is the hour that God has ordained to reveal the Sons of God to the earth. He is delivering us from the Levitical and Babylonish priesthood to the Tabernacle of David (*Amos 9:11-15, Acts 15:14-17*) where we can minister in the liberty of the Holy Spirit as priests to one another and the world. (*1st Cor. 14:26, 1 Peter 2:9-10*) "These are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience". (*Luke 8:15*)

Our Father has purposed "to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth." (*Eph. 1:10*) Any move towards ecclesiastical structure puts stumbling blocks to the unity of the Body of Christ both locally and universally. It is the embryo of denominationalism and can lift the mobile ministry out of the necessary love relationship with and accountability to the local eldership and make them an elite group: the clergy of the ministry.

The mobile ministry is the blood to the body and as such carries the nutrients, but the local church and eldership is the heart, which pumps the blood.

Jesus is the head who determines the moving of the body by the Holy Spirit and through the members.

It is in the local church that the new believer discovers the heart of God through the apostle's doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer and worship. (*Acts 2:42*) It is in the body life he begins to intimately know Christ and become mature fruit ready to be given to the lost world.

It is in the local church he learns submission and discipleship to mature eldership (1 Tim. 3:6) and it is from the local church he is commissioned to function in the grace which the Spirit gives. The local church is the school of the Spirit and the practical revelation of the person of Christ on the earth. Its elders must intimately know the flock, having personally disciplined them, and function as its shepherds. If the sheep know the shepherd's voice, it follows conversely that the shepherd knows the sheep. Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd and I know my own and mine own know me." (John 10:14) Paul writes "Know them that labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and esteem them highly in love for their works sake." The practice of moving shepherds every few years to a new congregation prevents the shepherd from knowing the flock.

Faith and patience inherit the promise. We must allow for time in God's maturing process. A young tree does not bear good fruit overnight, but with the proper care grows into an oak of righteousness.

The gospel of necessity requires that we depend on Christ alone, that we keep to a minimum our earthly inheritance and depend on our love relationship in the Holy Spirit to one another. We must expect the Lord to come and prepare our hearts for His coming. Our purpose must be fourfold:

1) To reveal the Son of God

"For this is the Father's will and His purpose, that everyone who sees the Son and believes and cleaves to and trusts and relies on Him should have eternal life and I will raise him up (from the dead) on the last day." (John 6:40 Amplified)

"And to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages has been hid in God who created all things." (Eph.3: 9 Amer. Stand)

2) To Declare Christ

"(The purpose is) that through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety and innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere. This is in accordance with the terms of the eternal and timeless purpose which He has realized and carried into effect in (the person of) Christ Jesus our Lord. In whom, because of our faith in Him, we dare to have the boldness (courage and confidence) of free access - an unreserved approach to God with freedom and without fear."

(Eph.3: 10-12 Amplified)

3) To Love Jesus and one another

“That you may really come to know practically, through experience for yourselves - the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge (without experience); that you may be filled (through all your being) unto all the fullness of God - (that is) may have the richest measure of the divine presence and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God himself.” (Eph. 3:19 Amplified)

4) To Glorify God

“Now to Him who, by (in consequence of) the (action of His) power that is at work within us, is able to (carry out His purpose and) do superabundantly far over and above all that we (dare) ask or think - - infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams...To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever, Amen. So be it.” (Eph. 3:20-21 Amplified)

May the Lord Jesus richly bless you and give you wisdom

Yours in Christ
Charles E. Smith