

Foundations

The Cornerstone Story, by Pastor Gerald Martin

CHAPTER ONE

Early Beginnings

Like we all do, Cornerstone has a past. And in order to know our heart it is necessary to know something about that past. Since I was so much a part of the beginning of Cornerstone the story also includes aspects of my past that have helped in the shaping of the church and ministry. Especially in the early days of planting and developing the church my story and the church story tend to blend together making it difficult to distinguish one from the other. Actually, it's all part of the same story. So why is it important for people to know about the past? You have probably heard the saying, "If you don't know where you have come from, you probably won't know where you are going." It may also be true that you won't know where you are. Knowing our history gives us a perspective on the present and future that otherwise would not be possible. We have found that a major obstacle to spiritual growth that many believers face is failure to adequately come to terms with their past.

For whatever reason, when we become Christians the tendency is to ignore the past in an attempt to hide what we really were or continue to be. We stuff it down and try to forget it especially if our past was painful or unpleasant. What we don't realize, however, is that it never goes away. Our past is a real part of who we are and try as we might to rid ourselves of the hurts, problems and unresolved issues, we continue to be negatively affected unless our past is properly dealt with. Many people who have been saved from their sins don't know that they can also be saved from the hurt and guilt of their past. They don't know that God has provided a way for them to be set free, healed, forgiven,

delivered and changed into a new person. Over the years we have had the privilege to minister into the lives of many hurting people who have come to us discouraged and broken. Helping them come to terms with their past and seeing them move from brokenness to wholeness has been a tremendous blessing.

Birth Pains

As a church we understand the challenge of coming to terms with hurtful experiences. Cornerstone was born out of a very painful situation. Previous to the planting of the church I was the pastor of a traditional church in the Mennonite denomination. It had a long history and a rich heritage with the distinction of being the oldest Mennonite church in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia established in the early 1800's. I began my ministry with the church as an interim pastor with the expectation that I would only be there for a short time and then move on to a larger church. I had just come out of a very painful situation in my previous church and needed time to regain my perspective and discern future direction. The church had also gone through a difficult time. A number of families had left leaving those that remained feeling pretty discouraged. A hurting pastor and a hurting church may not have seemed to be a good combination but the interim arrangement turned out to be good for both of us. It removed any pressure on my part to prove myself and on the part of the church to impress the new pastor. The atmosphere was very relaxed and since I was only planning to be there nine months I preached my heart without worrying about how it might be received. I figured I had nothing to lose. Perhaps the church thought the same way that since I wouldn't be there long they wouldn't have to take what I said too seriously.

In reality, our hearts connected. People in the church started responding to my preaching and leadership and renewal began to happen. New people started coming and the church began to grow. After a few months the interim arrangement was changed to a longterm assignment and we

agreed to serve a four year term. When we first went to the church everyone agreed that they wanted to see the church grow. The declining attendance had been a great concern. So when the church started to grow it was viewed as a very positive turn of events and everyone was encouraged and excited. People were getting saved and filled with the Holy Spirit. People looking in from the outside were amazed that what was happening could be happening in that church. It became one of the bright spots in the conference. We were actually experiencing new wine in an old wineskin. However, we were soon to learn the truth of Jesus' words, "You cannot pour new wine into old wineskins".

As the church grew the ministry began developing in a way that was different from the way things had always been done. Some in the church started having second thoughts about wanting the church to grow. It seems that they had not realized that along with growth comes change. As more and more new people came into the church those who had been used to influencing the decision making process found themselves in a minority. They felt like their church was being stolen away from them. I won't share all the details of what happened, but in a nutshell, an opposition group formed within the church and an attempt was made to shut down the new life that was taking place. In an attempt to have me removed as the pastor, a petition was circulated and submitted to the our conference leadership. Had I responded in the same way I had before in similar situations I would have simply resigned and moved on to another church. But God made it clear to me that I was not to make the decision to leave and that I was to walk it out to the end whatever it might be. A listening team made up of three persons from the congregation, three from the district and three from the conference was appointed in response to the petition to help discern the situation. The team set a day to meet and invited anyone who so desired to come in and share what they had on their minds. While there were some who voiced their dissatisfaction, most had positive reports to share. Testimonies were shared of how their lives had been changed and what God was doing.

Afterwards one of the conference leaders shared that hearing the testimonies was for him like a spiritual renewal. Much to the disappointment of those who desired to have me removed, the discernment of the listening team was that I should continue as the pastor. After that things settled down for a while and the church continued to grow. However, when it came time to process the renewal of my contract for another four-year term an attempt was made to keep that from happening. While the opposition was not strong enough to have me removed as the pastor, in the end it was strong enough to prevent me from being called to a second term. When that became final I felt released to move on at the end of my term. Realizing that with our departure many of the new people in the church would probably scatter, the district leadership approached me and asked if I would be willing to pastor a new church if one was started. I agreed to that possibility. So, the district council met and took action to plant a new church with the understanding that I would serve as the pastor. A congregational meeting was called and the chairman of the council announced the plan to the whole church and indicated that everyone could choose to either go with the new church or remain with the existing church. To say the least, not everyone was happy with that decision but it nevertheless provided a way for a new wine skin to be developed in order to contain the new wine that was fermenting and at the same time to preserve the old wineskin from further breaking. It seemed to be a win/win situation. As the transition unfolded the new emerging ministry didn't miss a beat. It simply changed locations, took on a new name and continued to grow. The existing church called a new pastor and returned to its former pattern of church life. The people were given a clear choice.

New Life Out of Brokenness

So, what is the message in all of this? No matter what happens God can and does work things together for our good. Out of a broken, painful situation God raised up a new church and ministry that exceeded by far anything we could have thought or imagined at the time. What the enemy had designed for evil, God turned into an incredible blessing. We continue to be amazed at what God has done in response to our walking

through the situation rather than seeking an escape. We give him all the glory for He alone is worthy to receive praise. Perhaps the greater message is that what he did for the church is what he does for each of us as individuals. Could it be that God allowed Cornerstone to be birthed the way it was in order to serve as an example of God's grace. Over the years we have seen that what he did for the church he has done for many people who have come to us from broken hurting situations in their personal lives, many of which we have seen healed and restored. I'm reminded of the Gaither song, "Something Beautiful. Something good. All my confusion he understood. All I had to offer him was brokenness and strife. But he made something beautiful out of my life." That's what he did for the church and he will do the same for you. No matter what your situation is. No matter how much you may be hurting. No matter what anyone says about you or does to you. When you yield it all to Him, He takes it and makes something beautiful out of it for His glory.

CHAPTER TWO

Early Development

When we began to first organize as a new church we soon discovered that not everyone had the same idea about what kind of church it should be. There were a lot of decisions that needed to be made. And about two months before we actually launched the church we began to meet every week to plan for the future. At the time our numbers were pretty small so we did most of our planning and processing of decisions as a whole group. changing for the sake of change. Instead, our goal was to simply follow God's leading one step at a time as we had been doing without pushing any set agenda. Even though some were convinced otherwise, our vision was not to become a tongue speaking charismatic church. It wasn't that we were opposed to speaking in tongues, Charismatic expression in praise and worship or any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Actually we were open to all that but we wanted God to lead us into whatever he wanted us to experience in his timing rather than any of us pushing certain things because we thought that was the way it ought to

be. We just wanted things to be real and not something that was hyped up. As we sensed the Lord leading in a certain direction we shared it with the group and gave opportunity for discussion and prayer and when it seemed there was a peace about something we made decisions and moved ahead. However, there were some things that from the beginning were not up for debate. One had to do with the issue of accountability. There were some in the group that thought we should not continue as part of the denomination but should become an independent church.

Missions

A third issue had to do with missions. From the beginning we considered ourselves as a missions minded church. The first conference we had was a missions conference. However, not long after the church was started, it was suggested by some that we take our faith promise missions offering and apply that to paying for our church building. The reasoning was that we were a mission just getting started, so why sent money out to others when we needed it ourselves. It sounded good but it flew in the face of being a mission minded church. We made it clear without much discussion that we were not interested in being independent for the sake of independence. We were part of the denomination when revival started happening and unless there was a definite reason not to we would continue to be a part. The denominational leadership had helped us work through a very difficult time and had supported and encouraged the formation of the new church and we saw no reason to withdraw at that time. This was one time I simply said, no, we couldn't do that. Period. I explained that missions is the spiritual lifeline for the church. I used an illustration of a deep-sea diver with an air hose to the surface. I pointed out that keeping the missions money for ourselves would be like cutting the air hose beneath the surface of the water.

It would only be a matter of time until life would end. I tried to make it clear that we needed an outward focus. Otherwise we would become self centered and run the risk of self-destructing. Therefore, keeping the missions money was not an option. We spoke of the new church as

being transdenominational. We chose to operate above denominational lines that tend to separate rather than bring unity. However, the time did come later on when we asked to be released from the denomination. But it was not in order to be independent but to be faithful in our calling to stand for truth. It was not an easy decision but when it became clear that the denomination we were part of was moving in a direction that we felt clearly violated the Scripture we decided it was time to leave. Our request was granted at that point we became a non-denominational church. Not everyone agreed with me but at least it settled the issue. It never came up again. Not every issue is worth going to the wall for and a pastor needs to be careful that he doesn't over do it but there are times when going to the wall for an important principle is justified and necessary. This brings me to a fourth issue that had to do with our understanding of leadership. Spirit Led Development Another issue had to do with Spirit lead development. There were those in the group that thought we should become a full-fledged charismatic church. With nothing to hold us back we could cut loose and be free. We made it clear that we had no intention of leaving.

On May 18, 1986, six weeks after we launched, 111 people joined the church as charter members. We thought the church would grow but we had no idea that what we are experiencing today would happen. Since then we have seen the church grow from one local congregation to multiple congregations meeting in Harrisonburg, Waynesboro , Crozet, Virginia Beach and Richmond here in Virginia. We also have churches in Marion and Morgan counties in Missouri, Charleston, SC and Bradenton, FL— and more are being added!

Leadership

We explained that the primary role of the pastor was not to do all the ministry but rather to train and equip the people to do the work of ministry according to Ephesians chapter 4. This was a major change from the usual understanding. In many churches the pastor is hired by the people to do ministry for them. There is very little thought given to the biblical concept that every believer is to be a minister. In general, the

traditional church has had it backwards. Instead of the pastor being viewed as the leader, the people are viewed as the leaders and instead of the people being viewed as the ministers; the pastor is viewed as the minister. The end result is that pastors get discouraged and the people get frustrated because neither is able to do what God has called them to do.

Internationally we are helping to plant churches in Italy, Albania, China, India, Nigeria and Montenegro. From a group of about 100 people we have grown to about 1500. In 1989 we started Cornerstone Bible College, which is now Cornerstone Bible Institute & Seminary. A year later in 1990 Cornerstone Christian School was started with 2 teachers and 19 students. Today the school has about 20 teachers and 150 students. Our missions program has grown from an annual budget of about \$30,000 to over \$250, 000. (* note these were the statistics in 2004!) Someone observed that the church is much like in a football game where there are 24 men on the field in dire need of rest and 50,000 fans in the bleachers in dire need of exercise. For too long pastors have been over challenged and the people under challenged. We simply turned it around and explained that the pastor needs to be free to lead and the people need to be trained and equipped to do ministry. In a time when mega churches are becoming more and more common our progress may not seem all that significant. Nevertheless we have been amazed at what God has done. Our growth hasn't been without struggle. We have made many mistakes along the way, more than we care to admit. I guess I can say that we have had enough successes to keep us encouraged and enough failures to keep us humble.

One thing for sure is that any thing good that has happened has been in spite of rather than because of us. We can take no credit. It has only been by God's grace and if there is any praise or glory it all belongs to Him. This takes a little getting use to, especially for those who come from traditional churches where the pastor is hired and controlled by the people. What we have found, though, is that much more ministry gets

done and there is a lot less hassle when it comes to making decisions. The people trying to make all the decisions and the pastor trying to do all the entire is a very inefficient and unfulfilling model. Launching Well, these were some of the things we grappled with in those early beginning days that helped set the course of the ministry. On April 6, 1986 we had our first public worship celebration. Two hundred forty four people showed up. We were blown away. We had purchased a little church building in Broadway, VA from the Methodist. It was packed out. However, it didn't stay that way. The attendance gradually decreased every Sunday for a number of weeks. It got down to 138 before a following Sunday was higher than the one before.

CHAPTER THREE

Covenants

The earliest confession of the Christian church was Jesus Is Lord. After the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, the disciples began to praise God in such a manner that it attracted a crowd of people that the Bible says were amazed, bewildered and perplexed. Some even accused the disciples of being drunk. We are not told exactly what the disciples were doing that gave that impression but it is apparent that it was something out of the ordinary. So, Peter stood up to explain what had just happened and went on to preach a sermon. At the conclusion he made this bold declaration. "Therefore, let all the house of Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36)." What we have here is the announcement of a new covenant. Now if we are going to understand what it means to confess Jesus as Lord we must know something about the concept of covenant.

Agreement Between Two Parties

A covenant is an agreement between two parties. It's like a contract. In this case it is an agreement or contract between God and His people.

When we confess Jesus as Lord we enter into an agreement with God. We covenant with him. Now, it is important for us to understand that in this new covenant God draws up all the conditions and our part is to simply agree with it. It is not like when we draw up a contract with another person. For instance in buying or selling a house, the owner may set the selling price and then negotiate with a potential buyer until they agree on the amount. At that point they would sign a contract that represented the negotiated price they agreed on. In this case both parties speak into the conditions of the contract or covenant. It is not that way when we enter into covenant with God.

The Old Covenant

When we enter into covenant with God we have no input into the conditions. God sets the standard and draws up the conditions of the covenant. Our part is to simply agree with what he says. That was the way it was when he entered into covenant with His people in the Old Testament. God gave the law to Moses, Moses read it to the people and the people said we will do all that the Lord God says to do. There were no ifs, ands or buts. Furthermore, God outlined what would happen if they obeyed or disobeyed the terms of the covenant. He said, if they obeyed they would be blessed. But if they disobeyed they would be cursed. In Deut 28, God lists the blessings and the curses they could expect. The key word in this Old Covenant that God made with His people was that little word "if." God's blessing depended on that one word. If they obeyed they would be blessed.

That proved to be their undoing. Even though they had declared they would do all that God said they were to do, it seemed they simply could not follow through with their end of the agreement. Over and over again they would sin and disobey what God had said. And true to His word, a curse would be brought upon them. This produced a repentant heart and they would cry out for forgiveness and God would rescue them. For a while they would serve God only to again sin and disobey. It became a

cycle that was repeated over and over. The Old Covenant didn't seem to be working.

The New Covenant

Finally, God said he was going to make a new covenant, not like the old one they couldn't seem to keep. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days" declares the Lord, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people (Jer. 31:31)." "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances (Eze. 36:26,27)." Under this new covenant that God says he will make the conditions are the same, obedience is still required, but there is a marked difference. Under the Old covenant the key word was "if." Under the New Covenant the key word is not "if" but "shall."

God says, you shall be My people, I will be your God, I will cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will obey." It almost sounds like the people have no choice. How can this be? It's simple. God says he will place His own Spirit within them. Under the New Covenant God does radical surgery and cuts out the old heart and replaces it with a new one. You see? We are changed from the inside out. No longer do we have to strain and strive in order to be obedient. No longer is it an external matter of keeping the rules. Under the New Covenant God takes responsibility for our obedience and sees to it that we become what He wants us to be. This is confirmed in the New Testament. In Phil. 2:13 we read, "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure". Here we see that not only does God cause us to be obedient but makes us willing to be obedient. We see a similar word in Heb. 12:20-21, "Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal (new) covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His

will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

Here again it becomes clear that God takes responsibility for our obedience. It's God that works in us. Jesus is Lord One might ask, but don't we have to do something? Yes, we have a very important part to play. But it's not what you might expect. Actually it is so simple that many professed Christians miss it. Yet it is so profound that when it grabs hold of you it will revolutionize your life. It has to do with acknowledging Jesus as Lord. Believing in Jesus is not just giving mental assent to the fact that He lived, died and rose again. Believing in Jesus involves yielding one's life to Him in complete surrender and giving Him permission to take control and do whatever he wants. It can be summed up in a little song that goes like this, "I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord, I'll do what you want me to do, I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord, I'll be what you want me to be." Understanding this takes a lot of the pressure off of living the Christian life. For many professed Christians living for Jesus means doing and being what you don't want to do and be. It becomes a constant battle trying to live like a Christian experiencing one defeat after another.

Trying to be a good Christian is working from the outside in. It doesn't work any better than it did for the people under the Old Covenant. Yielding our lives to God and allowing Him change us from the inside out makes all the difference in the world. This is an important concept if you are going to understand Cornerstone. We don't preach a legalistic external kind of religion. Our emphasis is not on being good Christians but rather on entering into a personal relationship with Jesus. We don't have a list of rules and regulations that people have to measure up to in order to become members. We don't pressure people to conform to some external standard. Does this mean there are no standards? No, not at all. The Bible is the standard.

The Bible as the Standard

We believe our responsibility is to preach and teach the Bible as the standard for our lives but it's God's responsibility to change us. You may look around and see people in our church doing or saying things and wonder how they can be accepted as part of the church. Hopefully, this helps to explain it. Like God does for each of us we accept people where they are and trust God to change them according to His own timing and purpose. You see? The grace that saves us is the same grace that matures us. The Apostle Paul speaks to this in Gal. 3. He says, "You foolish Galatians, who has tricked you. Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" You see? We are saved by grace through faith not by works. The same is true when it comes to our spiritual growth. Growing up is not something we simply decide one day to do and so we start trying to do Christian things. Growing up in Christ is about God working in us to both will and do his good pleasure. We can't change ourselves anymore than we can save ourselves. Likewise, we can't change others anymore than we can save them. We can present the truth of God's Word but it's God who changes hearts and lives. Therefore we don't have to judge one another's level of maturity. Instead we free them to respond to God's grace in their lives and rejoice with them in their spiritual growth.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Lordship of Jesus

On the Day of Pentecost when Peter declared that God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ he was taking a very bold stand. Everyone knew that Caesar, the emperor, was Lord. It would not have been quite so bad had he simply called Jesus a lord among others but to declare him both Lord and Christ set Him above all others. And to make such a claim ran the risk of being charged with treason. The New Covenant establishes Christ as the supreme authority above all other authorities. To acknowledge Him as such means to yield completely to Him allowing Him to take complete control of one's life. It is more than simply repeating the words "Jesus Is Lord." It is a life response. It is living in

submission to the will of the Father. However, making the initial decision doesn't automatically bring you into line with His will. While one's eternal destiny is determined by that initial decision to follow Jesus, living out that decision is a life long process.

There are actually three aspects to our salvation, past, present and future. When we receive Christ as Lord we are saved and our eternal destiny is set. While our life continues on this earth we continue to be saved from destructive patterns of life as we are transformed into the image of Christ. When Jesus returns we will be completely saved from all sin. As Lord, Jesus is at the heart of our church. Our loyalty to Him comes before every other loyalty whether it is to, government, denomination, doctrine, opinions or anything else. It is important that we understand this. Otherwise one may have difficulty understanding how we can have people in our church from so many different backgrounds and different doctrinal understandings and yet function in unity.

Dogma or Doctrine?

The key is recognizing that our unity is in acknowledging Jesus as Lord. If our unity was based on doctrine then only those who interpreted the Bible the way we do could be part of the church. But since agreeing on our particular understanding is not a requirement for going to heaven we have chosen not to make it a requirement for belonging to the church. Does this mean that doctrine is not important? On the contrary, it is very important. We have a clearly defined doctrinal understanding that we teach and preach. There are even some things that we are dogmatic about. We refer to those things as dogma. Dogma has to do with those foundational core beliefs that most evangelical Bible believing Christians across denominational lines are in agreement with. These beliefs are summarized in the Apostles' Creed and include belief in one God, the creator of all things, Jesus as the only Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, crucified, raised from the dead, ascended into heaven and is again, the Holy Spirit, the universal church, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. We make no apology for being dogmatic about the dogma. However, when it comes to doctrinal issues we have chosen to

allow room for differences. Doctrine has to do with beliefs based on Scripture that evangelical, Bible believing Christians may not agree with.

While different denominations may have distinctive doctrines that set them apart from each other, they are all still considered part of the universal church of Jesus Christ. A Baptist or Presbyterian distinctive is their understanding of eternal security. A Mennonite distinctive is their understanding of peace and non-resistance. The Pentecostals have a distinct understanding of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. A Nazarene distinctive is their understanding of holiness and perfection. There are many examples that could be cited. However, the point is that doctrine differs from dogma in that there can be honest differences of interpretation while still being faithful to the truth of Scripture. Coming out at different places on doctrinal issues doesn't exclude one from the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we have chosen not to be dogmatic about doctrine and to not allow doctrinal differences to be divisive issues in the church.

Opinions and Preferences

There is a third level of beliefs that I should mention yet. We refer to this level as opinions or preferences. In this area we give even more latitude for differences. This has to do with such things as style and personal preferences in worship, order and length of services, use or non-use of instruments, dress codes, hair styles, wearing of jewelry, posture in prayer, clapping, dancing and raising hands in worship and so on. While Scriptures may be found that refer to these things and while there may be times when the church should set certain guidelines, in general we leave such things up to the individual. However, we do preach and teach what the Bible says about appropriate behavior and appearance. We are just not dogmatic about it.

Understanding the difference between dogma, doctrine and opinions will help you understand how we can have people in our church from many different denominational backgrounds with differing Biblical interpretations and contrasting lifestyles and yet experience unity in the

Spirit. It's not that way in all churches. In fact many churches are confused at this very point. Both Liberal and Fundamentalist churches can be very dogmatic but tend to end up being dogmatic about the wrong things. Liberal churches tend to reduce the dogma to the level of opinion while Fundamentalist churches tend to raise opinions to the level of dogma. As a result both end up in serious error unable to effectively advance the Kingdom of God. To take what the Bible clearly spells out as truth and make it optional or to take what the Bible gives latitude on and make it mandatory results in a distorted representation of the gospel leading to spiritual bondage and death. That's the reason you never see a healthy, growing, vibrant, life giving Liberal or Fundamentalist church.

Love, Acceptance & Forgiveness

As a church that tries to function above denominational barriers our goal is to be dogmatic in matters of Scriptural dogma, to extend grace in matters of doctrinal differences and to give freedom in areas of personal opinion or preferences. We have adopted this as our philosophy of ministry that can be summarized in the three words, love, acceptance and forgiveness. I believe these three words describe every church that sincerely acknowledges Jesus as Lord. Love is often misunderstood in our society. It is more than a warm fuzzy feeling one might have for another person. Love is an action. God loved us so much that He gave His only Son. True love is described in I Corinthians 13 as patient, kind, not jealous, doesn't brag, get provoked, become arrogant, doesn't seek it's own way or take into account a wrong suffered, rejoices with the truth, bears, hopes and endures all things and never fails. The only way we can demonstrate this kind of love is to truly make Jesus Lord in our lives. Then and only then can we see and relate to people as He did. Acceptance is love in action toward sinners.

Jesus provides a strong example for us. Of all the people he related to sinners seemed most comfortable in His presence. You would think it would have been the good religious people. But no, it was the sinners. He accepted them where they were and ministered to their need. Religious people tend to look down their noses at those who may not

measure up or who have made a mess of their lives. Jesus looks at them as sheep without a shepherd in need of a savior. If Jesus is truly Lord we can do no less. Someone has said the church is not to be a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners. My Greek professor in college told us in class one day that every church should have a sign over the front door that reads, "For Sinners Only." Forgiveness is simply releasing another from our own personal judgment. When we judge another we set ourselves up as God for that person. We have no right to do that. In fact when we do that we place ourselves in grave danger because according to the Bible we will come under the same judgment ourselves. Jesus did not have a condescending attitude toward sinners. He loved them and was able to see beyond their sin.

Some years ago I went to the dentist. Before he laid me back in the chair to work on my teeth he related a story I still treasure in my heart. A man had come in not long before who in his words didn't look like the usual church going kind of guy. In their conversation he discovered that he attended Cornerstone. The dentist was curious and asked him what it was about Cornerstone that he liked. The man thought for a moment and simply said, "they love you, they accept you and they don't hold your past against you." The dentist told me that hearing that brought a tear to his eye. As I heard the story from the dentist it brought tears to my eyes as well.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Authority of Scripture

Closely related to the Lordship of Jesus are the Authority of Scripture and the Power of the Holy Spirit. In fact one cannot really separate them but for the sake of understanding we need to look at each one separately. II Timothy 3:16 says that, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in

righteousness that the man of God may be adequately equipped for every good work.” Here the Apostle Paul is writing to Timothy, emphasizing the divine nature of the written Word of God. He has just explained to him that in the last days difficult times would come. Men would be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revelers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, irreconcilable, malicious gossips and etc. In verse 5 of chapter 3, he says that they would hold to a form of godliness but deny the power and that he should turn away from such persons. Then in verse 7 he goes on to say that they will always be learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. I believe we are living in the days Paul describes in these verses.

There is obvious moral confusion within our society and even in the church. At one time sin was sin. It doesn't seem to be that way anymore. There are those who are purposing that the Bible is no longer the standard of moral behavior. According to some modern day theologians even homosexual practice is not sin. Using the same logic neither is prostitution and sex acts with animals considered to be sin if done in love. I know that sounds pretty bizarre but it represents the kind of heretical conclusions that are being circulated not only in our society but also in the church today. Example of ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of truth. To declare that Jesus is Lord and not maintain a high view of Scripture is highly contradictory.

Living under the Lordship of Jesus requires us to submit to the authority of His Word. Otherwise there is no standard by which we can measure our lives and examine our beliefs. And if there is no standard everyone is left to do what is right in his own eyes. We believe and teach that God has given us absolute moral standards for guiding our lives. He doesn't leave us to figure it out for ourselves. While we have the freedom to reject and rebel against the standards he has set we cannot escape the consequences. The Bible is to us what a framing square, level and measuring tape is to a carpenter. Without these basic tools a carpenter would have a difficult time building a house. I guess it would be possible to guess at the measurements and eyeball what is level, straight or

square but the lack of a standard would be obvious in the end. It is hard to imagine what a house built without any building standards might look like when finished. In the same way it becomes quite obvious when people try to build their lives apart from the standard outlined in God's Word. It is just as important for us to have standards for building our life as it is for building a house. If we don't believe that the Bible as God's Word is the standard, we have nothing to measure by to know if we are truly living in the truth. If there are no absolutes then truth is whatever a person determines it to be. In sharp contrast to that we believe that the Bible provides clear, objective, absolute truth that shapes our beliefs and provides a standard for our behavior.

A "High" View of Scripture

What makes this so serious is that it undermines the high view of Scripture that the true church has held from the time of the early church we read about in the Bible. The only way possible to justify such deviant behavior is to either grossly misrepresent the clear teaching of Scripture or drastically undermine its authority. Those who sanction and promote the so-called gay Christian lifestyle end up doing both. While claiming to be Christian they revise the message and in so doing distort the truth of God's Word. It is an A Firm Foundation When, we believe in and accept the authority of Scripture we also have a firm foundation for effective ministry.

We can declare what it says without apology and without being intimidated by those who question its authority. Actually our task is not to defend the Bible but to simply preach, teach and live it. It is impossible to be equipped for every good work like the Bible instructs us without being confident that it's true. I don't think I have ever met anyone who questions the authority of the Scripture that is actively involved in leading people to faith in Christ. Unbelief and evangelism simply don't go together. On the other hand, a church that only emphasizes the Spirit opens itself to all kinds of excesses. It is amazing what people come up

with in the name of “the leading of the spirit.” I have heard of persons being lead to divorce their spouse in order to marry someone else.

A more bizarre example is two unmarried people being so spiritual that sexual intimacy becomes a holy expression of their Christian love for one another. In cases like this they may be lead by a spirit but it is most certainly not the Holy Spirit. We can be assured that the Holy Spirit will never lead anyone to violate the clear teaching of Scripture. As part of Cornerstone you need to know that we hold a high view of Scripture. If the Bible says it we believe it and that settles it. Actually, as I heard the late Dr. George R. Brunk II say once, “If the Bible says it, that settles it whether we believe it or not.”

We will be judged by what it says not by what we think it should say. Those who attempt to revise the Scripture to allow for sinful practices that are clearly forbidden by God only add to the spiritual confusion that is so prevalent today. Here at Cornerstone we have tried to keep our teaching on the authority of Scripture and the power of the Spirit in balance. As a result it seems we have attracted people with traditional backgrounds looking for more freedom as well as those from charismatic backgrounds looking for more stability. I believe the Lord has honored our desire for balance and has protected us over the years from both drying up and blowing up. Instead we have been able to grow up. However, it hasn't been without pain. We have certainly been tested and tried in the process, but having stayed the course we are experiencing the fruit of righteousness just like the Scripture promised we would. Rather than making excuses for sin we must constantly be examining our lives in light of Scripture. If there is a discrepancy between what the Bible says and what I experience the answer is not to change the Scripture but to change my experience.

The Lord revealed to me early in my ministry that the challenge for us is to always be bringing our experience up to the level of Scripture rather than lowering the Scripture to the level of our experience. However, what we need to keep in mind is that it's a process, a life long process of change from the inside out. A major test for us had to do with a decision

we made to leave the denomination. The main issue had to do with our understanding of the authority of Scripture. What we discovered was that we were not on the same page as the denominational leadership. Teaching was allowed in the denominational colleges and seminaries that actually undermined rather than built up faith causing spiritual confusion among the students. Calling attention to this didn't seem to have a positive effect.

Scripture and the Holy Spirit

The authority of Scripture must always be kept in balance with the power of the Holy Spirit. Much damage can be done where one is emphasized at the expense of the other. The Scripture gives stability to the move of the Spirit and the Spirit gives life to the written words of Scripture. I have said many times that a church that emphasizes only the Scripture tends to dry up, a church that emphasizes only the Spirit tends to blow up, but what God wants is for his church to emphasize both the Scripture and the Spirit so it can grow up. After many meetings and much discussion it became evident that we were not moving in the same direction. Within the denomination there was a growing sense that the community of faith rather than the Bible determined what was right and wrong. It was a case of placing the authority of the church above the authority of Scripture. Not taking a clear stand on the homosexual issue was a case in point. Therefore we requested and were granted a release from the denomination. A church may have sound doctrine. It may even pride itself on being a Bible believing church but without the Holy Spirit it is simply dead orthodoxy. In a situation like this the overall attitude becomes judgmental and condemning. Verses may be used to support rules and regulations that produce bondage rather than freedom in Christ. Instead of seeing the Bible as a standard to measure our own lives we begin to use it as a rulebook to use in beating people over the head. That doesn't bring life. In II Cor. 3:6 the Bible says the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.

CHAPTER SIX

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Before Jesus left earth to return to heaven following his resurrection he told his disciples that they would receive power after the Holy Spirit came upon them and they would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Furthermore, he instructed them not to attempt anything until they received this power. They were to go back to Jerusalem and wait for it. On the day of Pentecost as they were waiting the Bible says there was a noise like a rushing mighty wind and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. This event brought a radical change in the life of the disciples. Where before they had been timid and fearful hiding behind locked doors they now became bold, fearless witnesses sharing the gospel with everyone they met. No longer dependent on their own natural abilities they discovered supernatural power to do extra ordinary things. They healed the sick. They worked miracles. They preached the gospel with power. When brought before the local authorities and commanded not to preach in the name of Jesus, they simply declared that they must obey God rather than man.

The Bible says that when the authorities saw their courage and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). The disciples recognized that it had nothing to do with them but was a direct result of the Holy Spirit working through them. In explaining what was happening, Peter declared that it was what was spoken through the prophet Joel, "And it shall be in the last days,' God says, ' that I will pour forth of my Spirit on all mankind...both men and women (Acts 2:17-18)." The church we read about in the Bible was clearly a Holy Spirit filled and empowered church. In contrast to that much of what we see happening in the church today has little if anything to do with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Too often we try to do the work of God without the power of God. Many Christians try to live the Christian life without the power of God. The

result is what Paul said to Timothy, that in the last days people would hold to a form of godliness but deny it's power (II Tim 3:5). Many Christians today are like the believers that Paul met in Ephesus. He asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They said, no we haven't even heard there is a Holy Spirit. Paul asked them what baptism they received. They said John's baptism. Paul then told them about Jesus and they were baptized in the name of Jesus. At that point they were saved. Then he placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

The Holy Spirit “Within” and “Upon”

A difference that many Christians fail to recognize is the difference between the Holy Spirit in us and the Holy Spirit upon us. The Holy Spirit “within” saves us. The Holy Spirit “upon” empowers us. That may seem like a small difference but the implications are quite large. God never intended for us to simply be saved but to be witnesses. But in order to be effective witnesses we need the power of the Holy Spirit upon us. Otherwise we are limited to our own natural abilities. We believe that God's will is for every believer to not only be saved but also to be empowered by the Holy Spirit for supernatural works like we read about in the book of Acts. So, if we don't experience what we read about in the Bible, what is the problem? Some try to explain it by saying that God has changed the way he works.

It may have taken the miraculous to get the church started but once it was established, healings, miracles and the other supernatural gifts of the Spirit were no longer needed. I guess if one is looking for an excuse that's as good as any. But to me it seems pretty arrogant to blame God for our lack of vitality and spiritual power. The Bible says that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. The church we read about in the Bible is the same church we belong to today. If it doesn't seem that way, whose fault is it really? While it may be convenient to say God changed his plan, the Bible simply doesn't support such a notion. The Bible

nowhere gives even a hint that the supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit that were given to the church on the day of Pentecost were rescinded.

One Scripture that is sometimes used to support the idea that spiritual gifts have ceased is I Cor.13:3 where it says prophecy, knowledge and tongues will end. However, what is often not noted is the timing. They will end when the perfect comes. This is a clear reference to the time of Christ's return. God's plan for the church has not changed from what we read about in the New Testament. Whether or not we ever fully experience it that way has to do with our faith, obedience and full surrender to His will and purpose. Speaking in Tongues Probably the most controversial aspect of any teaching on the Holy Spirit has to do with speaking in tongues. Do you have to speak in tongues in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit? While we are not dogmatic about it, our understanding is that it's not that we "have" to but rather that we "get" to.

The Bible seems to indicate that while not everyone receives the gift of tongues to speak a message in the church assembly every Spirit filled believer has the privilege of speaking in tongues in prayer and intercession and in praising God. In the matter of tongues we have purposed to stay close to what the Bible says. Therefore, while we encourage the use of tongues in one's private devotions and personal expression of praise and worship we discourage it in addressing the congregation. In I Cor. 12 the Apostle Paul makes it clear that in the public worship celebration it is better to speak in a language that everyone understands. In fact he goes so far as to say that he would rather speak five words in a known language than 10,000 words in tongues. Was he against tongues? To the contrary, he goes on to say that he wishes they all would speak in tongues and that he himself speaks in tongues more than all of them. The question is not whether speaking in tongues is for today.

It's obvious from reading the book of Acts that it was part of the experience of the New Testament church. So, if it had value and edified the believers then it certainly has value and is needed today. We try to give everyone joining our church an opportunity to learn about and

personally enter into the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. However, it's not something we are dogmatic about or require. On occasion we have had a prophetic message in tongues with interpretation during our worship celebration but for the most part such messages are spoken in a known language. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that prophetic words are for edification, exhortation and consolation. In general that is what we use to judge a prophetic word. We caution our people about putting too much stock in directional kinds of prophecy. What I mean by that is prophetic words that give specific direction to another person's life. For instance, a specific word spoken over someone like who to marry, where to live or what to do are directional prophecies. We believe that persons need to hear from God for themselves.

Prophecy

The value of praying and prophesying over someone is not to give new information but to confirm what God may already been speaking to their heart. For example, in ministering to one another there are times when God gives to one person a specific word for someone else only to discover that God had already spoken that same word to that person. It not only serves as a confirmation for the person being ministered to but also confirms that the one speaking is hearing from God. I will have more to say about that in a later chapter when I outline our understanding of the one another ministry. We need to exercise caution and humility when it comes to speaking words from God. No prophetic message to the church is 100% God speaking. There is always a mixture between what God is placing on a person's heart to say and what may be coming from within the person's own mind. That's not to say it doesn't have value. It can have great value. We just need to understand that every time someone declares a "thus says the Lord" it's not a direct word for word message from God. That's the reason the Bible says we are to judge prophetic words that are given in the church. When I give a prophetic word I tend to frame it something like this. I sense or "feel" as though God may be saying this to you. Whether we are speaking or being spoken to we must all keep in mind that it is the

Holy Spirit that is the One doing ministry. We are but human vessels through which his power flows.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Women in Ministry

An issue that has often been misunderstood by those outside Cornerstone has to do with how we view the ministry of women in the church. We have tried to take a Biblical approach in our understanding that often puts us in conflict with both liberal and conservative camps. While we believe that both men and women are free to minister in the church according to the gifting of the Holy Spirit we also believe that God has established certain responsibilities that are gender specific. In I Cor. 11:3 the Bible says “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.”

Here God establishes a definite order of headship, God, Christ, Man, Woman. However, Gal. 3:28 says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Here God establishes definite equality. Furthermore, Cor. 14:34 says “Let the woman keep silent in church, for they are not permitted to speak. And I Tim. 3:12 says “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet. But in Acts 21:9 we discover that Philip had four daughters that prophesied in the church and in Romans 16:1-3 Paul commends Phoebe as a servant of the church and instructs both men and women to assist her in her church work and recognizes Priscilla as a fellow worker in Christ. Taking these Scriptures at face value would seem to indicate that the Bible contradicts itself. On the one hand, it says women are to keep quiet but in actual practice they were very involved. How do we understand this?

Avoiding Error

It's at this point where I believe many people fall into error. They assume these scriptures support two conflicting positions, either the subjugation of women supported by many Fundamentalist churches or the complete liberation of women supported by many Liberal churches. While both positions claim Scriptural support our discernment is that neither represents a proper understanding of this issue. Those who emphasize headship tend to disregard equality and those who emphasize equality tend to disregard headship. Both approaches miss the mark. So, how do we understand what appears to be a contradiction? Let me suggest three important things to keep in mind as we discuss this. First, recognize the fact that "all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. (II Tim. 3:16 & 17)." If one believes that some scripture is inspired and some isn't then it becomes a matter of personal opinion rather than what God has to say. We considered that in an earlier chapter.

Secondly, recognize the fact that we do not understand perfectly God's thoughts and God's ways. Apparent contradictions seem that way to us because our understanding is limited and we are not able to truly comprehend it. God says in Is. 55: 8 & 9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Since we are finite human beings and God is infinite there will always be a gap in our ability to fully understand God. We see in a mirror dimly (I Cor 13:12). Third, recognize the fact that scripture must always be kept in balance with scripture. Often times what seems to be a contradiction is only two sides of the same truth. It's for this reason that we must pray that God through the Holy Spirit will give us insight into His ways and His thinking that we might come to a knowledge of the truth. Let me illustrate.

The Apostle Paul stresses the fact in Romans that we are saved by grace through faith. James in his book says we are saved through works. It seems like a direct contradiction, does it not? Who is right, Paul

or James. The truth is that both are right regarding the point they're trying to make. Yes, it is true that we are saved by grace through faith but it is also true that if it doesn't result in good works its not real faith. One cannot claim to be saved by faith while his life remains unchanged. Building a theology of salvation on works only or grace only leaves a great void in ones understanding and experience of salvation. Likewise, the scripture that says man and women are equal does not conflict with the scripture that says man is the head of woman. It's unscriptural interpretations that place them in conflict with each other. Equality has to do with our worth. In Christ man is not superior to woman or woman superior to man. At the foot of the cross we are all on equal ground.

Ministry and “Headship”

The context for equality in the Scriptures is grace. Grace involves all that which pertains to our salvation and to ministry in the church where both men and women fully participate according to they're spiritual gifting. On the Day of Pentecost it was made clear that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon all flesh both men and women, young and old alike. However, just because men and women are equal does not mean there are no differences. There are and always will be differences between men and women. This is where many people get confused. While equality has to do with worth, headship has to do with position or office. In Christ not everyone has the same office. The context of the headship Scriptures is government. Government has to do with spiritual oversight, order, and protection in the church. The reason Jesus was able to carry out his mission was because he was in proper relationship to the order God had established. It had nothing to do with his worth. He was equal with God but took upon himself the form of a servant and placed himself in submission to God the Father.

What many men and women react against when reading the Scriptures about headship is the very thing that frees protects and empowers them for effective ministry. We all are by nature rebellious and we don't want to submit to any authority outside ourselves. But until that rebellion is dealt with by God's grace and tested by his order we remain in spiritual

bondage. God's order was established before creation. It existed with the angels. And when Lucifer rebelled against that divine order in an attempt to be like God, he was thrown out of heaven and all of his followers with him. There is nothing that identifies us more with Satan than a rebellious heart. That's way the Bible says rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. Understanding the difference between grace and government is the key to bringing the equality and headship passages of Scriptures together. So, whether we are interpreting the equality or the headship passages we need to do so in light of the other.

When we do this it becomes obvious that the passages that speak of women being quiet and not instructing men cannot be taken literally as a mandate. If women are to literally keep quiet in the church then the early church was in violation of the Scripture. So we know it can't mean that. Otherwise Scripture would be in conflict with Scripture. Taking the whole Scripture into account it becomes quite clear that "keeping quiet" takes on a very specific meaning. Simply stated, it means women are not to take charge or to take control of. In other words, they are not to assume positions of oversight. In plain words, they are free to minister according to their gifting but in all due respect they are not to run or control the church. The same principle applies to the home. In Eph 5:22-28 we read that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church and that the wife is to submit to the husband as the church submits to Christ. While both the husband and wife partner together in the home, the husband is responsible for the spiritual oversight of his family in much the same way elders are responsible for spiritual oversight in the church.

In conclusion, even though this is an important doctrinal understanding of Cornerstone I must make it clear that it is not part of the dogma we talked about in an earlier chapter. Therefore we are not dogmatic about our understanding. But it is important that new people coming into our church know what we believe and what to expect. If you didn't know before, you now know why we believe it is Biblically permissible for a woman to preach, teach, sing, lead or whatever but not to hold the office of an ordained elder. Raising up and releasing both men and women into

ministry has always been part of our philosophy of ministry but in keeping with the Scriptures on headship we only ordain men to serve in the office of elder.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ministry Organization

In the New Testament we read very little about how the church was organized. About all it says is that the believers met together in large groups in the temple courts and in small groups from house to house. That's about the extent of it. However, when it comes to how they functioned together as a community of believers we discover a very different picture. Through out the New Testament many Scriptures give us insight into the way they functioned. They prayed for one another, confessed their faults to each other, submitted to one another, forgave each other, honored one another, carried each other's burdens, encouraged one another and admonished one another. We refer to these passages as the "one another" passages. Now, in order for the "one another" ministry to happen there had to be a setting conducive to such ministry. It would seem very likely that it took place in the house to house rather than the temple setting. Community and the priesthood of all believers was more than a mere doctrine, it was a way of life. After many years of neglect, the church is once again discovering the necessity of both small and large group settings in order to fulfill its true calling to edify the believers and evangelize the nonbelievers.

In recent years the New Testament pattern for doing church has become more and more common among Spirit-filled, life giving churches. However, much of the organized church continues to follow patterns of doing church that have in many cases long outlived their effectiveness, satisfied to simply maintain what they have rather than to make the necessary changes to actively seek and save the lost.

New Wine and New Wineskins

In order to effectively reach lost people both new wine and new wineskins are needed. Jesus clearly said that new wine couldn't be poured into old wineskins. Yet that is exactly what was attempted in the charismatic renewal over the last four or five decades. While it has made a positive contribution to the church its impact was greatly diminished due to not putting adequate structures in place to contain the life. Instead of providing a setting where the gifts of the Holy Spirit could be used by the body to minister to one another, far too often they were put on display in large gatherings of people seeking signs and wonders instead of the presence of Jesus. We believe that the primary place for the operation of the manifestation gifts of the Holy Spirit is in the small group.

While we have always had some form of small group ministry here at Cornerstone it wasn't until about 1992 when we attended a Fuller cell church seminar that we became aware that there was a difference between churches with cell groups and cell group churches. We decided to become a cell group church. This led to our attending a seminar by Dr. Ralph Neighbour who invited us to visit Faith Community Baptist Church in Singapore. We also visited the largest church in the world in Seoul, Korea. In 1994 we hosted our first cell church conference with Dr. Neighbour as the main speaker. The following year we hosted Dr. Neighbour, Lawrence Khong and a team from Faith Community Baptist Church at the Convocation Center on the campus of James Madison University here in Harrisonburg. These conferences helped to change the way we did church. We came to realize that the church as we knew it had drifted far from the New Testament pattern and to recover it would require a major paradigm shift. While the way we do things had changed in most every other area of life we realized the way we do church had changed little if any and for all practical purposes had lost its relevance in meeting the real needs of hurting people.

So what does a New Testament church look like? What did the early believers actually do? Acts 2:42 tells us that they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

A Model for Ministry

After a time of fasting and prayer it seemed that God gave us this as a model for structuring our ministry. We interpreted the Apostles doctrine to be the Scripture and spiritual authority, fellowship to be ministry and care for one another, breaking of bread to be worship and experiencing the presence of Jesus and prayer to be healing and spiritual warfare. Instead of establishing various departments we purposed to organize our whole church around these four pillars found in Acts 2:42. Since our vision was to experience church like we read about in the Bible it seemed right for us to devote ourselves to the same things they did. It's interesting to note that there were no departments of stewardship, evangelism or missions in the New Testament. They didn't seem to devote themselves to the things that most churches today see as important. Yet we discover that all these things took place. Physical needs were met. People were saved. Missions happened. It seemed that everything they did was directed toward advancing the Kingdom. But their devotion was to teaching, fellowship, worship and prayer. As a result believers were edified and non-believers were evangelized.

Now, where did this all take place? As I have already mentioned about all we know is that they met in the temple courts and from house to house. However, as time went on there seemed to be a move away from the house-to-house part so that it wasn't long until the focus became almost entirely on the public gathering. This led to a division between clergy and laity. Instead of the people using their spiritual gifts to minister to one another like they did in the New Testament the "holy man" took over the ministry and started doing it for them. In essence the clergy stole the ministry away from the people.

The Radical Reformation

This unbiblical pattern has dominated the institutional church from about 300 AD to the present time. While the 16th century protestant reformation did much to change the theology of salvation it did little if anything to change the theology of the church itself. The same clergy/laity division and church structures were was carried over and continued. An exception was a group of young radicals that thought the protestant reformers were not going far enough to recover New Testament patterns of church life. They determined to embrace the biblical concepts of believer's baptism, the priesthood of all believers, a life style of holiness, community, discipleship and the authority of Scripture to list a few. They were severely persecuted and many lost their lives at the hands of the reformers who thought they were taking things too far.

Called Anabaptists because they stopped baptizing their babies and instead baptized believers only, they were forced to meet in small groups in homes in order to survive. The Mennonite denomination grew out of the Anabaptist movement. So, with an Anabaptist heritage we were amazed to discover on our visit to Singapore that they were studying Anabaptist distinctive doctrines in their Baptist training school. What we have since learned is that the cell church movement today is much like the Anabaptist movement of the 16th century. Even more so than the present day denominations (Mennonite, Brethren, Quaker) that claim to be Anabaptists but for the most part have lost the Anabaptist vision to recover New Testament church life.

For all practical purposes these denominations have forsaken the vision and have been absorbed back into the accepted Protestant way of doing church in a way that reinforces the division of clergy and laity. Instead of equipping and training the people to minister to one another as the Bible instructs, the "holy man" does the ministry for the people while the people sit and soak Sunday after Sunday in services that do little if anything to promote the extension of the Kingdom. While continuing to believe in the doctrine of community and the priesthood of all believers the structure is not conducive to living it out in a practical way. Our basic

organizational structure is what Bill Beckham refers to in his book, “The Second Reformation” as a two-winged church. Just as a bird needs two wings in order to fly properly, the church needs two wings (small and large group settings) to function properly. The small group wing provides the context for the church to experience community and the priesthood of all believers. The large group wing provides the context for corporate worship celebration. Both are essential for fruitfulness in making more (evangelism) and better (edification) disciples. Therefore we expect all of our people to be involved in both cell and celebration

CHAPTER NINE

Leadership & Decision Making

The way we view leadership and the process of making decisions within the church is rooted in the meaning of church. What is the church? According to Ephesians 1:22 and Colossians 1:18 the body of Christ is the church. In the three major lists of spiritual gifts found in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 we discover that all believers are part of the body. Therefore, believers make up the church. In a universal sense the church is made up all believers around the world. In a local sense the church is a body of believers in a given area. The Bible also describes the church as being in a house, which would indicate an even smaller unit. In thinking of the church we must always keep in mind that Cornerstone as a local body of believers or as a network of churches is not the whole church. We are part of the extended body of believers in a given locality as the universal church that includes all those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, have received forgiveness of sin, and are walking in fellowship with Jesus.

For purposes of understanding our pattern of leadership we begin at the local level. If you are new to Cornerstone you will soon realize that we have a certain understanding of leadership and how decisions are made that may seem a little foreign to your way of thinking. That’s the reason we include a section on leadership in our foundations teaching. Let me

begin with what it isn't. For us leadership in the church is not a dictatorship where the head leader gives the orders and everyone does what they are told. But, neither is it a democracy where everyone makes the decision by majority vote. Now, depending on the situation there may be times when the pastor simply needs to make a decision or when the congregation needs to take a vote, but that isn't our general pattern for making decisions in the church. Doing too much of either extreme can result in either the pastor becoming too domineering or the congregation too controlling. Neither makes for a spiritually healthy church.

In contrast to that, we believe God gave us a pattern that takes into consideration the discernment of all the people without the pastor abdicating his responsibility to lead. Jesus is the Head of the Church that Jesus Christ is the head of the church. He is the real senior pastor. In submission to His headship all the rest of us in the body function according to our gifting and callings. Instead of us simply choosing what we want to do, the Holy Spirit chooses and places us in the body according to God's will (I Cor. 12:18). Being the senior apostolic leader of Cornerstone Church & Ministries International is not something I chose or even aspired to. But I know God has called me to fill this role at this time. It is important that all of us know what God has called us to do in the body. In the beginning days of the church our leadership structure included me as the pastor, a board of elders, a ministry council and the congregation. Having experienced the conflict caused by what I call a two-house system where the board of elders made the spiritual decisions and a church council made the program and financial decisions I determined that the ones who were praying should be the ones helping to make the decisions.

Therefore, instead of a two-house system where one group could cancel out the other we established a unified system. In computer language we established a serial connection rather than a parallel connection. As the pastor I was part of the board of elders, the board of elders was part of the ministry council and the ministry council was part of the congregation. In diagramming this we use circles rather than a flow chart

to show that it is relational rather than hierarchical. Beginning with Jesus at the center, the pastor is placed in the next circle followed by the board of elders, the ministry council and the congregation in the last and largest circle. I probably should insert here that when I was the only pastor on staff we ordained lay elders to help give oversight to the church. As the pastoral staff grew and we transitioned into becoming a cell church we phased out the active role of lay elders and recognized the ordained pastors as the elders in the church. While we no longer ordain lay elders we do have leadership teams in our smaller churches that function in that role along with the staff pastor. We have found that the structure needs to be somewhat flexible so it can change as the church grows. After all the structure is to serve the body not the other way around. Central to this pattern is recognizing first of all how decisions are made.

How Decisions Are Made

So, how does it work? Let me walk you through the process. Let's say that God gives a vision for something to the pastor that requires a decision. The first step would be to test it with the board of elders. If it resonates with the board of elders and they discern that it is indeed God's direction for the church the next step would be to test it with the ministry council and finally with the whole congregation. At that point the leaders at all levels put on their listening ears to hear what God may be saying through the body. What the pastor and other leaders look for at each level of testing is God's peace. A lack of peace may indicate that it's not the right timing or perhaps not the right direction. In that case the idea may be put on hold or abandoned altogether. You may think that this sounds good but are still wondering who actually makes the decision. Well, that depends on the nature and importance of the decision. After hearing and considering the feedback, the pastor may make the decision and simply announce it to the church or he may take it to the board of elders or the ministry council for a decision or on occasions to the whole congregation for a corporate decision. If the result of testing at the various levels is clearly positive the pastor or board of elder may simply make a decision and move ahead. However, if

significant checks are evident it may need to be processed further and the final decision discerned with a larger group.

This may seem a little cumbersome, especially if you come from a church that has a monthly congregational meeting where all decisions are made corporately by majority vote. Admittedly, testing direction at these different levels may take more time than simply calling a meeting and taking a vote but the goal is not to simply get a quick decision but to discern the will of God together. Sometimes the process is as important as the final decision. Over the years, there have been times when we didn't allow enough time to process certain decisions in the way I just outlined. Even though we may have ended up making the right decision in the end we experienced negative fall out that wouldn't have had to happen had we had the time to follow through with the whole process. On the other hand in following the pattern we have experienced times when dealing with controversial issues where not everyone agreed with the final decision, there was nevertheless a peace about the process. Making Spirit lead decisions doesn't mean that everyone agrees with every decision. Our goal has never been to only move ahead with a decision when everyone is in agreement. Rather our goal is to discern the will of God and at the same time to give room for people to disagree without making it a public display. Rarely have we had to resort to public meetings to air differences. On those few occasions it was largely due to short cutting the process. But even then we found God's grace sufficient to carry us through.

A criticism we have heard is that the leaders make all the decisions and that they are made before it ever gets to the congregational level. While it may seem that way from the viewpoint of a democracy, it isn't completely true. However, it is true that by the time it gets to the congregation level we have a pretty good idea what the decision will be. Otherwise, it probably shouldn't be shared at that level. If the elders and ministry council don't have a peace about a certain direction it's not likely

the congregation will. So, to bring issues prematurely to the whole body has the potential of polarizing the church. And that's something we try not to do. Another criticism has to do with who presents the things to be considered. Is it only the pastor or can others make suggestions? While everyone is encouraged to share ideas and make suggestions it is only the pastor and board of elders that determines what suggestions get processed. Being a pastor led church it is the responsibility of the pastor and leaders to communicate the vision and make sure things stay on course. Therefore, they need to decide what gets processed. This may not set well with persons who desire to be in control, get around the pastor and promote their own personal agenda. But this is part of what it means to be a Spirit led rather than a people led church. I'm sure there are other good leadership patterns but this is the pattern God gave us.

CHAPTER TEN

The Apostle's Teaching

When it comes to the Apostle's teaching we must understand that there is more to consider than the mere words of the message. Along with the words there was a spiritual authority that was recognized by the church. Since I already addressed the authority of the word in an earlier chapter I want to focus this chapter on apostolic authority and how that influences the way we function as a church.

A Common Misunderstanding

First, I want to clarify a common misunderstanding. Even though both come from the same root word, authority and authoritarianism is not the same. Authority is delegated from God and is absolutely necessary in order for a church to be in spiritual health. On the other hand

authoritarianism will do great damage and cause weakness and even death to spiritual life. Spiritual authority is only received as one comes under authority and it never demands others to submit. In contrast to that, authoritarianism places itself over others and demands blind submission and absolute, unquestioned obedience from others. Religious systems tend to become authoritarian in their approach to ministry when leaders lose their spiritual authority. It's important to understand that while it is not always easy to know where the line is between the two, our purpose and intent has been to function under spiritual authority without becoming authoritarian. To claim that we have been fully successful would no doubt be an overstatement. However, we believe that God has honored our decision to not shy away from spiritual authority for fear of becoming authoritarian like so many churches today have done.

Because of past experience of authoritarian leadership, some pastors are so afraid of being labeled authoritarian that they go the other extreme and refuse to exercise any authority. From my observation the end result has been spiritual anarchy, everyone doing what is right in their own eyes, where those who have been given the responsibility to lead and oversee the church shrink back from taking a clear stand even on issues that threaten the spiritual life of the church. The error of abusing spiritual authority is exceeded only by the error of exercising no authority. Neither extreme is pleasing to God. What we have tried to do as a church is to restore the Biblical understanding of authority and make practical application. Relationships and Accountability Second, spiritual authority can only be properly understood in the context of relationships and voluntary accountability. The early church was relational rather than organizational and inspirational rather than institutional. It wasn't until several hundred years after the church was founded that it became an organized institution. When that took place much of the spiritual dynamic that was present in the beginning was lost.

While the shift was gradual and took place over a period of years it was consummated in about 300 AD when the Roman emperor, Constantine

declared Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. This was followed by a thousand year period known in history as the dark ages. During this time the institutional church became rich and powerful and as noted by St Francis of Assisi, could no longer say like Peter, “silver and gold have I none,” but then neither could it say, “in the name of Jesus Christ rise up and walk.” In spite of the protestant reformation of the 16th century the institutional church has made little if any progress toward the recovering of New Testament spiritual authority even to this day. But God has always had a people. There has always been an inspirational church along side the institutional church. From about 100 AD to the present there have been over twenty different renewal movements, often labeled as heretics and persecuted for their radical faith.

We study these movements in the History of the Radical Church course we teach at Cornerstone Bible Institute. The point I want to make is that apostolic spiritual authority for the most part flows out of the inspirational stream of the church where brothers and sisters relate to one another in mutually accountable relationships under the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus demonstrated it for us in the way he related to his disciples. While he had many disciples, he chose twelve to pour his life into. He lived with them. He modeled a lifestyle of love, acceptance and forgiveness. They took trips, went boating, camped out and by spending time together in the presence of Jesus, they were shaped into a community. It wasn't easy. They struggled, competed and tried to gain position over one another. But slowly recognizing their need to give up their competitive lifestyles they learned that to be a leader was to be a servant. They learned that true worth was not in what they did but in who they were in relation to Jesus. They went out two by two preaching and casting out demons. They were amazed and came back rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them. Jesus told them that instead of rejoicing about that they should rejoice that their names were written in heaven.

The Key to Having Authority

It became clear that the key to having authority was being under authority. One day a centurion came to Jesus requesting that he heal his servant. When Jesus offered to go with him he insisted that would not be necessary saying that he too was a man under authority and could simply speak a word and it would be done. Jesus declared that he had not seen such faith in all Israel. Before the man returned home his servant was healed. Being under authority is an expression of faith that releases the power of God. Sometimes we speak of having a spiritual covering. While the Bible doesn't use that specific term it is certainly implied in the concept of being under authority. If you are under something it stands to reason that you are covered. Like an umbrella that covers you from the rain, as long as you are under or covered you stay dry. Get out from under the covering and you get wet. In a similar way spiritual authority is a covering. Stay under authority and you will have authority, otherwise it will be lost. Someone may say, "I don't submit to anyone but God." Such a statement reveals a gross misunderstanding of spiritual authority and how it operates. Claiming to be under God's authority while circumventing His delegated authority is a contradiction. While it may sound spiritual it is nothing more than saying, "I'm my own authority."

There are many illustrations in Scripture that indicate that the way we practically submit to God's authority is to submit to those in authority over us. When Israel rebelled against godly leadership it was the same as rebelling against God.

Everyone is Accountable to Someone

We believe it is important that everyone is under proper spiritual authority and that no one serves as his own authority. Everyone is accountable to someone. For us it is more than just something we say. We have adopted a system that makes it very practical. It's one that connects the whole ministry together from the most recent newcomer in one of our local churches to myself as the senior apostolic leader of the whole Cornerstone network. We do this through our system of cell groups. Cell members are accountable to their cell leader. Cell leaders

are accountable to their congregation pastor. Congregation pastors are accountable to the senior pastor/elder of a given location. The senior pastor/elders are accountable to the senior apostolic leader. Each level of leadership represents delegated authority. But since it involves human beings it should never be considered as absolute authority.

If a cell leader gets out of line, cell members can appeal to the congregation pastor. If a congregation pastor gets out of line the cell leaders can appeal to the senior pastor/elder. If a senior pastor/ elder gets out of line the congregation pastors (leadership team where there is only one staff pastor) can appeal to the senior apostolic leader. You may wonder what happens if the senior apostolic leader gets out of line. As a ministry we have chosen three men from outside the Cornerstone ministry to serve as spiritual advisors. Should the senior apostolic leader get out of line the senior pastor/elders could appeal to the spiritual advisors who would come in to help resolve the situation. In addition to these spiritual advisors Cornerstone belongs to the Association of Radical Church Networks (ARC Net). This is an association of church networks similar to Cornerstone. The leaders of these networks meet together twice a year for teaching, fellowship, worship and prayer in mutual accountability. So everyone is under authority, including the senior leader. However, it is not something that is demanded. Submission to spiritual authority is always voluntary and involves the freedom to choose. Otherwise it becomes authoritarian.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Worship

Another thing that the early believers devoted themselves to was the breaking of bread. We have interpreted this to mean experiencing the presence of Jesus. When Jesus broke bread with his disciples in the upper room he identified the bread as his body and the cup as his blood. After his resurrection he joined two disciples on their way to Emmaus. It wasn't until he took the bread, broke it and blessed it that their eyes

were opened and they recognized him. The Lord's Supper became the central focus of worship for the early church. The first day of the week became the time to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. In time it replaced Saturday as the Lord's Day for believers. Even though we don't observe the Lord's Supper every time we meet together for worship we nevertheless seek to enter into the presence of Jesus and experience his life transforming power. We believe that it is in the presence of Jesus that lives are changed and healed. Our pattern of worship has become one of the unique characteristics of Cornerstone and it wasn't something we copied from others. From our observation most charismatic type churches used pretty much the same pattern, one hour of worship followed by another hour of teaching. In the beginning that was the basic pattern we followed. However, standing for a whole hour of worship was problematic for some, especially the older people. I remember when we introduced the pattern the Lord showed us there was a peace and it answered the concerns we were hearing about needing to stand too long. Basic to the pattern that emerged was the understanding that New Testament worship has its roots in the tabernacle of David.

The Tabernacle of David

At the same time the more traditional, ritualistic ceremonies were being carried out in the tabernacle of Moses, David built a new tabernacle that was marked by spontaneous praise. Instead of the ancient rituals of lighting candlesticks, burning incense, setting forth bread and making animal sacrifices the service were marked by singing, rejoicing, dancing, clapping, shouting, instrumental music, new songs and offering up sacrifices of praise. The tabernacle of David was a prophetic expression of what real worship was to be. It's like God rolled back the curtain and gave David a revelation of spiritual worship and showed him that it really wasn't animal sacrifices that he wanted but rather a sacrifice of praise. That certainly agrees with what we read in the New Testament. For instance, Hebrews 13:15 says, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips: that give

thanks to His name. That is what was happening in the Tabernacle of David.

Many of the Psalms were written in the context of worship in the Tabernacle of David rather than the Tabernacle of Moses. Someone may say, but that in the Old Testament. True, but we must understand that while Psalms is in the Old Testament it is not of the Old Testament. It's like what Jesus said about us being in the world but not being of the world. Worship in the Tabernacle of David was actually an alternative to the old established pattern and not everyone appreciated it. David's wife Michah didn't like it. When she saw David dancing and making what she thought was a fool of himself, the Bible says she despised him in her heart. She was not a happy camper by the time David got home that night. When she confronted him about it he responded by saying that he was doing it to the Lord and that he was prepared to be even more foolish in his praise to God. We see in this that controversy over patterns and styles of worship goes way back. So, I guess we shouldn't be too surprised when it happens today.

The Function of Worship

Worship is meant to bring us into the presence of God. The word itself comes from a contraction of the old English words worth and ship. It means to ascribe worth to God. When we worship we extol the name of Jesus, we sound forth his praises and we give him glory. One of the best compliments anyone has ever given us concerning our worship was by someone after attending one of our services. She said it was evident that the name of Jesus was being exalted. For us, a corporate worship service is not something to endure but rather to enjoy. I remember something Gene Gossett, one of our long time members, said in response to a comment someone made to him about going to church on Saturday night to get it over with so he could have Sunday free. Gene let him know that he didn't go to church to get it over with. The attitude of getting it over with misses the whole point of worship that is to experience God's presence and lift up the Name of Jesus.

I have to admit that many church services are conducted more like a funeral than a resurrection. Like one pastor mentioning the names of those who had died in the service. One little boy quite concerned asked his parents if it was the first or second service. Celebration Cornerstone views our corporate worship service as a celebration. In fact we use the word celebration rather than worship to describe our Sunday or weekend service. Everything we do from the time we enter the doors until we leave is part of the service including greetings, songs, prayers, announcements, offerings, special music, sermons, ministry and even the before and after fellowship.

There are four main sections to the service, celebration (welcome), adoration (worship), proclamation (word), and exultation (works). Actually, it is the same basic format we follow in our cell group meetings. Each section has a unique focus and purpose.

Celebration

In the celebration section the focus is on singing songs of praise. The purpose is to break the ice, get everyone freed up and involved in praising God. The songs that are sung are usually up-tempo, joyful, hand clapping type songs with words about God. At this point our attention is not so much directed toward God but toward one another as we sing songs that declare our faith and life in Christ. The communication direction is horizontal. During this time people may still be coming in, greeting one another and finding their seats. The atmosphere is joyful, enthusiastic and action oriented. There may be dancing, shouting, applause, whistling and other similar expressions of praise.

Adoration

By the time the celebration is over most everyone has arrived and found a place. Before sitting down the pastor usually invites everyone to turn and greet those around them. This is followed by the official greeting, welcome, announcements and pastoral prayer that naturally leads into

the next section we call adoration. Beginning with the offering and offertory the atmosphere takes on a somewhat more reverent tone. The direction of communication shifts 27 from the horizontal to the vertical as our attention turns toward God. Instead of singing songs about God, in this section we sing songs to God. We sing directly to him. There are usually no clapping or loud demonstrations. Depending on the words being song people may raise their hands, close their eyes, bow down, kneel or even lay face down on the floor. The purpose is to enter into and experience the awesome presence of God that often leads to a quiet time of listening. At times a prophetic word may be shared. At other times we may simply spend a few minutes in total silence basking in the conscious presence of Jesus. This is the quietest and most reverent part of the service and is usually concluded with a simple amen.

Proclamation

Proclamation is the third section. With the ice broken through celebration and our hearts prepared through adoration we are now ready to receive the Word of God. When there is a prophetic word or special music that too is part of the proclamation but for the most part it is the sermon. The communication direction is still vertical, but instead of it being from us to God as in the adoration, it is from God to us. The purpose of the sermon is to teach, inspire and motivate. We encourage our people to take notes and be prepared to share in their cell groups, when they next meet, what they remember from the message, what God is speaking to them and how they can be prayed for.

Exultation

The fourth section in the service is exultation. The word, exult means to rejoice triumphantly. During this section opportunity is given for ministry at the altar. Pastors and cell group leaders are available to pray for and minister to those who come to the altar for whatever need might be present, including salvation, baptism in the Holy Spirit, encouragement, prayer support, healing, or deliverance. Songs are sung that express yielding, surrender, calling out to God and recommitting our lives. The

communication direction is both horizontal and vertical and from us to God and God to us. This section is usually closed with a triumphant song, praise for the victories won and a strong parting prayer of blessing over the people bringing the whole celebration service to a grand finale.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Fellowship

Fellowship is another of the four things that the New Testament church devoted them selves to. Two that we have already considered include the apostles teaching and the breaking of bread. The final one, prayer, will be considered in the next chapter. So, what is the Biblical understanding of fellowship? It's obvious that it means much more than what we today usually consider fellowship. When we think of fellowship the kinds of things that come to mind are get togethers, picnics, covered dish dinners, hanging out with friends or having a conversation. That may be fellowship but it's a far cry from what the kind of fellowship the early believers devoted them selves to. The Greek work that is translated "fellowship" in the Bible is the word "koinania" that embraces a range of relationships that our modern use of the word "fellowship" simply doesn't touch. It involves the development of deep relationships, getting along with one another, really learning to know one another, bearing each others burdens, confessing faults to one another, praying for each other, encouraging one another and living together in accountable relationships.

Therefore, when God created and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden it was an extension of community that already existed in the Godhead. That's what made it such a wonderful place. They experienced fellowship in its fullest form and expression. In unbroken relationships it was a place of giving and receiving in complete openness, honesty and transparency that can only happen in community. Spiritual, emotional and physical intimacy was altogether pure and completely void of shame. God and man were able to walk and

talk together freely with total ease and comfort. In essence, the result of sin entering the garden was the breaking of relationships, the destruction of community and the loss of fellowship. Life quickly turned from ecstasy to tragedy. Jealousy arose that led to murder. One tragic event followed another. Mankind degenerated from bad to worse until God repented that he had even created man and purposed to destroy what he had created.

However, the Bible tells us that Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. God spared him and his family and thus spared the human race from being completely wiped out. Community The Centrality of the Cross The nature of Biblical fellowship can perhaps be summed up best by the concept of community. The teachings of Dr. Ralph Neighbour Jr. have been very helpful to us in shaping our understanding of community. What the believers in the early church experienced was a restoration of community. It was restoration because that is what God created us for in the beginning. Actually it was the way things were before the beginning. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit lived in community before creation. They were one in purpose and heart. The story of the Old Testament is one of God calling his people back into community with Himself. It was an up and down, in and out experience to say the least. God so desired to be in fellowship with his creation only to have his offer rejected time after time. But in the fullness of time God sent his own Son to restore the relationship that was broken, the community that was destroyed and the fellowship that was lost.

He gave up his life and taking upon himself the sin of the whole world, he died on a cruel cross at the hands of his own creation saying to the Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing. When Jesus spoke of the Father he said that he and the Father were one and the same. He said if they had seen him they had seen the Father. When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit coming he referred to him as another one exactly like himself. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three persons in one. It's a mystery that we cannot fully understand. While we may never experience community to the same degree as the Trinity, that was

nevertheless what we were created for. For the first time in all eternity the community that existed in the Godhead was broken when Jesus cried out, "My God, why have you forsaken me." You see? It's through what Jesus did on the cross that provides the foundation for restoring community.

The key to living in community and experiencing the quality of fellowship demonstrated in the New Testament is first going to the cross realizing that it was my sin and your sin that put Jesus there. The early believers lived in the reality of the cross. That is the reason they were able to devote themselves to Biblical fellowship and a common unity. Confessing their sins, carrying each other's burdens, laying down their lives for one another, showing compassion, submitting to and honoring one another and being patient and forgiving of one another was simply the practical outcome of having personally identified with the cross. The reason so much of our modern fellowship is so shallow in comparison is because much of the church has gotten way from teaching the cross. Living the crucified life seems to be foreign and unfamiliar to many churchgoers today. In too many instances, feel good religion has replaced sacrifice, personal preferences have replaced truth and convenience has replaced obedience. With a vision to experience church like we read about in the Bible, Cornerstone does not hesitate to call people to a radical commitment to Jesus.

Equipping the Saints for Ministry

We take seriously the Scriptural mandate to equip the saints to do the work of ministry. Not having time is no excuse for disobedience. Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples. For three years he poured his life into twelve men that he chose to be with him. Normally, these men would not have associated with each other. Apart from their relationship with Jesus they had little in common. But living with Jesus for three years had a profound affect on them. Jesus modeled a life of love, acceptance and forgiveness. At first they struggled and competed for position. But slowly their values changed. They learned that to be a leader meant being a servant. They learned that true worth and

significance was not in what they were able to do but in who they were. By living with these twelve men, Jesus gave us a picture of how community works.

He didn't just call them together for an hour or two on Sunday morning. He spent time with them. They took trips together. They went fishing. They visited Jerusalem together. They had cookouts by the sea. It was three years of hands on interactive training that turned them into faithful disciples. When Jesus left the earth to return to the Father, he commissioned them to go and make other disciples. He left the whole future of the church he came to establish in the hands of his disciples. When the Holy Spirit was poured out as promised those disciples were so energized that it was said of them that they turned the world upside down.

Turning the World Upside Down

We believe that God is again raising up a people that will turn the world upside down. We have purposed to be part of what God is doing today. One of our early policies was not to ask God to bless what we were doing but rather to align ourselves with what God was blessing. As we look around today, it is evident that God is pouring out his blessing on the local church. Over the last fifty years or so it seems like the cutting edge for evangelism and discipleship has been in parachurch organizations. Billy Graham and other crusade evangelists have been used in the past to bring many people into the Kingdom. Navigators founded by Dawson Trotman and YWAM founded by Loren Cunningham have been greatly used in discipleship training and mission outreach. But as good as these things have been, what I see God doing today is restoring evangelism and discipleship to the local church in the context of community and fellowship like it was in the beginning. Churches today that are realizing the greatest results are those that have developed a system that effectively wins lost people to Christ, helps them get free from sinful patterns, discipless them and equips them to win and disciple others.

A pattern that seems to be coming into its own was developed by Robert Coleman and published in a book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* about forty years ago. Dr. Coleman was way ahead of his time. It seems that just now the principles he outlined in his book forty years ago are being embraced and implemented in a practical way. In keeping with our commitment to follow God one step at a time as he leads the way we are on the brink of a new adventure that will take us to the next level in experiencing church like we read about in the Bible. About ten years ago we embraced the values of the cell church in an attempt to devote our selves more fully to Biblical fellowship and community. With what we have learned and experienced we are poised and ready to do whatever it takes to align our selves with the new paradigm God seems to be blessing today. Our goal is to leave no one behind.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Prayer

Prayer is the fourth thing that the Bible says the early disciples devoted themselves to. In reading the New Testament it becomes evident that prayer was the most vital aspect of the early church. It was after ten days of prayer in the upper room that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost. It was in a prayer meeting after Peter and John were released having been arrested for healing a lame man that the place was shaken by the power of God. When facing the problem of caring adequately for certain widows, the Apostles prayed and laid hands on deacons to take care of these needs so they could continue to give adequate attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word that flows from prayer. When Peter went up on that roof to pray the Lord gave him a vision that lead him to go the house of Cornelius to share the gospel with the Gentiles. Later when Peter was placed in prison the Bible says the church met to earnestly praying to God for him and the prison doors were opened and he was lead to freedom by an angel. It was during

worship and fasting that the Holy Spirit told the church at Antioch to set apart Barnabas and Saul for missionary work. So after, they fasted and prayed they placed their hands on them and sent them off. On a later missionary journey Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten thrown into prison, put into the inner cell and their feet fastened in the stocks. As they were praying and singing hymns there was an earthquake and the foundations of the jail were shaken and all the prison doors flew open and the chains came loose. As a result of prayer, people got saved, baptized in the Holy Spirit, healed, and set free from demons.

Lives were transformed by the power of God. It is inconceivable to think of the early church apart from consistent, dynamic personal and public prayer. As it was for Jesus, prayer was at the heart of everything the early believers said and did. One of the “Four Pillars” The origin of Cornerstone was birthed in prayer. Over the years prayer has been an important part of the ministry as it has developed. Along with the Apostles teaching, fellowship and breaking of bread it has served as one of the four pillars supporting the whole ministry. In explaining this I sometimes draw a building starting with the foundation plank that extends from one side of the building to the other representing the Lordship of Jesus. On top of this plank I draw two planks side by side representing the Authority of the Scripture and the Power of the Holy Spirit. These three planks make up the foundation. On this foundation I then draw four pillars one on each side with the other two evenly spaced between them representing the Apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

These pillars represent the core around which the whole ministry is organized and provides what is needed in order for the church to fulfill the mission to make more and better disciples. To illustrate this I draw two planks that form the roof meeting in the middle. The roof planks supported by the pillars represent evangelism (making more disciples) and edification (making better disciples). Important to our understanding is that neither edification nor evangelism is one of the pillars but rather supported by the pillars. This is significant in that while edification and

evangelism must be taking place for the church to grow the effectiveness of both depends on the quality of the infrastructure that provides support. The early church did not devote them selves to edification and evangelism. They devoted them selves to the Apostles teaching (instruction), fellowship (joined lives), breaking of bread (worship) and prayer (communion with God). But the outgrowth of that devotion was edification and evangelism.

The Bible says that the Lord added daily those who were being saved. When the church has its priorities right and is devoting itself to doing the right things the Lord takes care of the results. What people often see are the results. It's like driving past a house. What you see is the external parts, the roof, the siding and the landscaping. The infrastructure while it may not be seen is nevertheless a very important part of the whole and actually gives shape to what is seen on the outside. Prayer IS the work! Prayer is the infrastructure of the church that if not present will cause a diminishing effect on all of edification and evangelism that we do. Therefore, we have called on our people to pray. Prayer vigils, half nights of prayer, prayer walks, prayer drives, concerts of prayer, all night prayer meetings, prayer breakfasts, noon prayer meetings, personal and corporate prayer, public and private prayer, prayer in the streets, prayer on the mountains, prayer in the Spirit and prayer with the understanding are all part of the prayer culture that helps give shape to the prayer infrastructure of Cornerstone.

Prayer is not preparation for the work, Prayer is the work of the church! It was like Joshua being defeated by Ai due to sin in the camp. When the sin was uncovered and dealt with they went back and were victorious. The key to victory in spiritual warfare is holiness and unity. Prayer without holiness and unity is not real prayer. At best it is only a religious exercise, a clanging symbol, words without power. That's the reason the Bible makes it clear that if a husband doesn't treat his wife with proper respect his prayers will be hindered (I Peter 3:7). Fasting has also been a common observance. We offer instruction and set times for corporate fasting and prayer. There is a strong scriptural precedent for this.

Inner Healing Prayer and Spiritual Warfare

Over the years Cornerstone leadership has taken seriously the mandate to pray. In pastoral staff meetings significant blocks of time have been devoted to prayer and seeking God. There were times when we rented a van and prayer drove the counties here in the central Shenandoah Valley. We visited and prayed over civil war sites. We drove around and prayed over courthouses, jails, schools and churches. We took authority over demonic forces in prayer. At times we joined with other pastors in the community to pray for each other, our community and nation. I remember a time after a pretty aggressive prayer drive of confronting the powers of darkness it seemed like we came under unusual attack of the enemy. We experienced some pretty devastating things in the church. It crossed our minds that we were perhaps taking on more than we were spiritually able to handle. On the other hand it was gratifying to know that the enemy was being threatened by our praying. One thing I think we learned was that directly confronting the enemy is not to be taken lightly and can actually be dangerous, especially if there is a lack of unity or hidden sin in the ranks. On one occasion, we sustained some significant spiritual damage from confronting the powers of darkness.

We decided to pause our spiritual warfare for a season and discovered that there were vulnerabilities in the relationships among our leadership team. These vulnerabilities were providing the enemy with an opportunity to attack. In time, when those relationships were repaired and unity was restored we went back to the same location and announced to the enemy: "We are back!" Once again, we prayed boldly and took authority in the name of Jesus over the powers of darkness. As I remember, we experienced victory and were not overcome by the enemy. 31 A major part of our prayer ministry has been in the area of inner healing. Roy and Florence Kreider joined Cornerstone soon after it was founded. They served for over 30 years as missionaries in Israel.

One of the challenges they faced was working with people who had been severely persecuted, many of whom lost loved ones in the holocaust where 6 million Jews were put to death for no reason other

than the fact they were Jews. How do you share the gospel with people with hatred in their hearts toward those who had killed fellow Jews? Roy and Florence did a lot of listening and in time were able to lead many to faith. Even today their ministry is producing fruit as many evangelical messianic leaders continue to view Roy and Florence as their spiritual parents. It was with this background and experience that they came to Cornerstone. It soon became evident that they had a lot to contribute to the development of the church. I don't know that anyone has kept a record but hundreds of people have been directly impacted by their ministry of prayer healing. I know they have had hundreds of sessions where they have sat with people leading them to deal with past hurts and bringing them to a point of forgiveness and healing. There is no way to measure the full extent of their contribution to the ministry but it has extended well beyond those that they formally and informally talked with personally. The way they have ministered among us has done much to shape the overall culture of prayer in our church. 24/7 Prayer Vision In closing one personal prayer goal I have for the church that has not yet been reached is a 24/7 prayer center. This simply means a continuous prayer meeting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week where people can call for personal prayer. It hasn't happened yet but I believe at some point it will.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Stewardship

After accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, being baptized in the Holy Spirit and established in a Bible believing church, the most important commitment we make is probably in relation to our giving. I read somewhere that there are about 500 verses in the Bible on prayer and about 500 verses on faith, but about 1000 verses that have to do

with giving. That in itself would seem to indicate the importance of giving. I decided to be up front with people about this principle. At the risk of being misunderstood and at the risk of making some people a little uncomfortable we decided to teach the principle of giving without apology. Over the years we have included regular times of teaching and preaching on stewardship, challenging our people to embrace the Biblical principle of giving. Much of Jesus' teaching had to do with the handling of money. Perhaps the reason the Bible has so much to say about this subject is that it reveals like nothing else what or who really controls our life.

Say what we will, the way we earn, save, spend and give our money is often a pretty accurate indicator of our true priorities. So we believe it is important to know what the Bible teaches about the principle of giving. The Bible speaks of three kinds of giving, tithes, offerings, and alms. Sometimes these words are used interchangeably and the distinct meaning of each is missed. I want to try and outline the difference. First, let's consider the tithe. What is a tithe? A simple definition is this. A tithe is ten percent one's income. Someone may say they tithe two percent or five percent. That is a contradiction of terms. They may indeed give two or five percent of their income but that's not tithing. The word "tithe" means "one tenth part of."

The Principles of Stewardship

Biblical principles are for our blessing. I have come to believe that the reason many believers live in spiritual defeat is not because they don't love and serve Jesus but rather because they fail to embrace and put into practice the principles God has given us to guide our lives. Most often it is due to ignorance, not having been taught what the Bible says or to having the principles taught as rules or commands that if not obeyed will jeopardize one's salvation. The first mention of the tithe is found in Genesis 14 where Abram paid a tithe to Melchizedek, the high priest of Salem. It is mentioned again in Genesis 28 where Jacob promised to give God a tenth of all he received. Both of these instances preceded the law that answers the objection some people raise about

tithing. They argue that since we are under grace rather than law we are not required to tithe.

While that may be true it doesn't nullify the principle. Actually the tithe preceded the law and nowhere in the Bible is there any indication that it ended with the law. Our salvation is not based on observance of all the principles outlined in the Bible. We are saved by grace through faith. However, we can be assured that disregarding those principles opens us to reaping undesirable consequences. Living by the principles of God's Word is a choice. When we make wrong choices we set ourselves up to miss out on the blessings that God desires to release in our lives. The principle of giving is a case in point. The tithe is given to support the local ministry. In Malachi 3:10 the Bible says that we are to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. I believe the storehouse in the Old Testament is equivalent to our local church today. The tithe brought into the storehouse was used to fund the local ministry, take care of the needy and support the Levites who served as the spiritual leaders among God's people.

Today we take this to mean everything that happens at the local level including the pastor's support and various ministries for the extension of the Kingdom here on the home front. Therefore, we ask that people give their tithe to the general fund where they attend and receive ministry. Many pastors are reluctant to speak about giving due to manipulative practices of unscrupulous radio or TV preachers making claims and promises that go beyond what the Bible says. However, there is a danger of reacting in fear and going to the other extreme and not teaching the principle at all. As a result the church often lacks the necessary funds to carry out its God given mission and the people miss out on the blessing of giving due to ignorance of what the Bible says about the principle of giving.

Alms aren't always gifts of money. In Acts 9:36 the Bible refers to alms deeds. This may include a helping hand, gifts of clothing, food, furniture or some other item. Jesus said even a cup of cold water given in His name would not be unnoticed. Like offerings alms is given above and

beyond the tithe. To help facilitate the giving of alms the church has a compassion fund that people can use to give alms through. A person may desire to give alms to someone in need but wants to remain anonymous. Giving through the compassion fund is a way to do that. Offerings Offerings are different in that there is no set percentage. Offerings are given above and beyond the tithe as one is moved in his heart. Like tithes, the practice of giving offerings was established before the law was given going back to Genesis 4 where Cain and Able gave offerings to God. Offerings were used to build the tabernacle and the temple. It's interesting to note that they didn't use the tithe to build facilities. Instead they shared the need and challenged the people to give. There was no compulsion. It wasn't a tax. The people simply gave out of their own free will.

Cursed or Blessed?

So what happens if people don't give tithes and offerings? Rather than me telling you I'll let the Bible speak for itself. In Malachi 3:8, it says, "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'" The answer: "in tithes and offerings. Not only were they neglecting the tithe and the offerings they were bringing were not acceptable. Instead of selecting the best of their flocks for sacrifice they chose to sacrifice the blind, crippled and diseased animals. God told them to try giving gifts like that to their governor and see how pleased he would be (Mal. 1:8). In the case of the tabernacle people gave so much Moses had to ask them to stop because they had more than enough to complete the project. In general we believe that buildings are to be funded through sacrificial offerings rather than through the tithes. We have funded a number of major building projects this way where after a period of stewardship teaching people are given an opportunity to make a pledge indicating a sacrificial offering they are willing to give in a lump sum or over a one, two or three period. Realizing that giving ability varies the slogan we use is, "not equal giving but equal sacrifice."

God said, "You are cursed with a curse for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you (Mal 3:7)." That sounds pretty strong doesn't it?

Actually, God seems to say that if I don't tithe and give proper offerings I'm a thief. Is it any wonder then that God can't bless us? I don't know about you but that's a place I don't want to be. We also fund our missions program through offerings. Each year we receive what we call a faith promise offering for cross-cultural missions. We ask everyone to fill out a card indicating what he or she believe God will release to them for missions over the following twelve months. It is not a pledge and no one is obligated to give the indicated amount. It is a statement of faith and the funds are given as God provides. The total amount of the annual faith promise offering becomes the missions budget for the year. Again, giving to missions is an offering given above and beyond the tithe.

In contrast God goes on to say, "bring the whole tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. And test me now in this, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need." That sounds a lot better. Again, I don't know about you but for me that's where I want to be. For many years Sophia and I have tithed our income and given offerings and alms above and beyond our tithe. We haven't become wealthy (at least not yet). Nevertheless, we continue to give by God's grace and actually no longer even think of not doing it. Alms ("Benevolence") A third kind of giving involves is alms. We don't use this term much today but it has to do with giving to the poor and needy. In Acts 10:4 we read of Cornelius who was recognized by God for the alms he gave to the poor. As a result he had a vision to send for Peter who came and shared the gospel and his whole household was saved. Alms is an act of righteousness. It really means compassion. Giving of alms is giving out of a heart of compassion to meet needs.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Christian Education

An important part of the Cornerstone ministry has been the development of a Christian School. We realize that not every church in our network is

able to have their own school but nevertheless the goal of every parent should be to immerse their children in a Biblical worldview. Teaching our children in the ways of God is a great responsibility that God has entrusted to parents. Whether parents choose a public, private, Christian or home school for their children, the fact remains that a Godly education is their responsibility. In the beginning, the earliest schools were in the churches, the teachers were the pastors and the main text was the Bible. Other books were used that reinforced the principles and values of the Bible that taught honesty, morality and character. The church, home and school worked together to provide a God centered education for the children. In good faith parents delegated the responsibility to teach their children to pastors and teachers that shared and reinforced their Biblical worldview. Children belong to God. In Psalm 127:3 it says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord."

The word heritage carries the idea of a loan. In other words children are on loan from God. Parents are stewards of God's heritage and as stewards they are responsible raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). That simply means children are to be taught and trained by both word and example that all life involves God. Schools like Harvard, Princeton and Yale were founded as training schools to raise up young men to preach the gospel. There were no government schools in America until 1837. Until then nine out of ten students attended private neighborhood schools. The first public school was established by Horace Mann, a Unitarian who started promoting a state controlled educational system. In those schools the Bible was still taught. However, in 1905 John Dewey, the father of progressive education introduced socialistic, anti Christian philosophy into the schools and the Bible was separated from academic studies.

Deut 6:5 is considered by Hebrew scholars to be the pivotal passage of the whole Bible. If there is one verse that stands at the center of all other verses, it is this one. "And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength." Jesus called this the greatest commandment of all. Simply put, it means everything we do is to involve

God. We acknowledge Him as the source and sustainer of all things. Therefore, we live for him every day of the week and not just on Sunday. That's the kind of lifestyle that must be imparted to our children. However, for the most part in main stream Christian America today there is a separation between the sacred and the secular that began when parents abdicated their God given responsibility and turned the training of their children over to the government. As long as there continued to be a Biblical worldview there didn't seem to be a problem. But over time the government schools were invaded and taken over by a godless educational philosophy that no longer acknowledged God as ultimate reality and the Bible as ultimate truth.

Let me review a little history. In Search for Religious Liberty Many of our ancestors came to America in search of religious freedom. The key elements that served to shape the culture in this new land were the church, the pastor and the Bible. When it came to teach- The Infiltration of Secular Humanism In 1933 the Humanist Manifesto was written by John Dewey and signed by 33 others. This document outlined the doctrine of secular humanism defined as a product of this world, of education and history that acknowledged no supernatural purpose. It represented a worldview that diametrically opposed the Biblical worldview. Over the following thirty years it gradually infiltrated the government school system and undermined Christian based education. By 1963 Bible reading and prayer in government schools had been declared unconstitutional and were legislated out of all public schools.

The schools could no longer teach and reinforce the Biblical principles and values of the parents. Instead they became a platform for those propagating secular humanism that the courts declared as a religion. The result has been devastating for America. Student SAT scores plummeted while teenage pregnancies, violent crimes, drug use, sexually transmitted diseases and divorce rates skyrocketed. How could this happen in a nation that was founded on Christian principles? It was due at least in measure to the withdrawal of Christians from involvement in helping set public policy. Even today, there are Christians who are

reluctant to get actively involved. Having bought into the misapplication of the separation of church and state, they assume that it's right that Bible reading and prayer be excluded from public schools and that indeed public schools should not promote Christian principles. This has led to statements like, education must remain neutral, Christian values can't be imposed on others and morality can't be legislated. After hearing such things repeated over and over even Christians start believing them and as a result go silent playing right into the hand of the enemy and his schemes against the body of Christ.

However, the good news is that not everyone caved in and followed the silent majority. Concerned Bible believing parents who understood the seriousness of what was happening began to withdraw their children from the government run schools and place them in Christian schools that began to spring up all across America. At one point for a period of time there were about three new Christian schools being opened every day. Some parents chose to teach their own children at home. The Christian school and home school movement in America has had a tremendous influence on the spiritual climate of our nation and the reclaiming of our spiritual heritage. Cornerstone Christian School Cornerstone has been part of this movement since 1990 when we opened Cornerstone Christian School with two teachers and 19 students. Presently we have about 20 teachers and 150 students. In August 2003 a special service is planned for the dedication of a new 30,000 sq. ft. school facility with classrooms for pre-school through eighth grade plus offices, computer and science labs, library and full size gymnasium. While not essential, having a quality facility will nevertheless enhance the already high quality of our education program. Our philosophy of education is that children need a protected environment during the early years of their schooling.

What they hear taught in the home, church and school must be in agreement. Otherwise they are subjected to a dualism between the sacred and the secular that will create a conflict of values later in life. We believe that it is very important that our children be clearly taught from a

Biblical point of view in the elementary and middle school years. This allows them time to get firmly grounded in what is true before being thrust out into the world. 35 Once they graduate from eighth grade with a solid Christian education they have a Biblical frame of reference for making responsible decisions as they enter the public high school. While still under parental direction and the influence of their church youth group, the high school years become a bridge between the protected environment of the Christian school and the completely free atmosphere they will face in college. It provides a time to test their wings and practice taking a stand for Christ before they are completely on their own. Having been grounded in the truth they will then be able to discern false teaching and will have opportunity to defend their faith in an environment more hostile than the Christian school but less hostile than what is often found on college campuses.

Our children must learn to live like Jesus prayed, in the world but not of the world. It is very important that they be thoroughly immersed in the truth but then they must also be helped to live that truth without compromise among people who may think differently. That is best done in increments of exposure rather than a sudden plunge. Ministry and the Family In closing I have one last word. While raising children is a primary focus for parents, it should never be seen as opposed to involvement in the Body of Christ. Raising Children is a ministry. It is front-line discipleship. Support from other members in the body of Christ is important for accountability and support. In some home settings, however, families can set up a tension between “family” and “ministry.” We have discovered that in some homes parents have an unhealthy suspicion of the church.

A separation is made and “family” ministry and involvement is separated from “church” ministry and involvement in an unhealthy manner. These children tend to grow up with distrust, lacking respect for the church. On the other extreme families have no separation between “family” and “church” so that the “the church” is always placed ahead of “family.” These children tend to grow up embittered toward the church. Neither is

a desirable outcome. We believe that your family is the “first line” of ministry within the church. It is important to involve the whole family in ministry! Don’t exclude your family from your ministry and don’t exclude your ministry from your family. Involvement in the Body of Christ is an essential part of the process of bringing your children up in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord.”