

An Honest Look at the Current State of the Church in 2013

About every ten years I seem to have to write a paper describing the awful downgrade and diminishing of the church, looking at causes. What is interesting today is that the slow destruction of the Protestant Church is now attracting the attention of secular journalists. This is because the decline of American Protestantism has recently accelerated and may affect political demography.

In 2012 the USA ceased to have a majority Protestant population. Fewer than 50% of Americans now identify themselves as Protestant Christians (of any denomination). Historically, the US has had a considerable majority of Protestant Christians, having been established originally as a Protestant homeland for refugees from European persecution of dissenters. Over the last 100 years this majority has been slowly declining, but even in 1993 almost 66% identified themselves as Protestants, and this figure had been stable for some decades.

The current decline is not just isolated to the more formal institutions of Episcopalians, Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterians, but is also affecting Charismatics and 'evangelical' Fundamentalist sects. The much-popularised 'mega-churches' (such as Rick Warren's Saddleback Church in California or Mark Driscoll's Mars Hill in Seattle) are not a picture of a growing Protestantism but the aggregation and relocation of already disaffected people.

What the statistics present is that discontented believers are leaving the churches wholesale and are not going anywhere at all. The secular journalists say that they are walking away from religion entirely, but that is not true. They are sick of formalism, liberalism, worldly practices, heresy, greedy leaders, superficiality, emotionalism, mysticism and all the other things that are wrong with the modern church. I believe that, in the main, the leaving people are mature folk who want to be truly religious (pious) and are sick of ungodly churches teaching error.

Newspapers then make note that Christian hard-liners¹ are targeting emerging Christian countries that have not yet developed a secular society to the level of the west; such as Uganda. They decry their involvement with African politics, such as encouraging anti-gay laws or withdrawal of free condoms. In the latter case HIV cases have spiked as a result.

This is because evangelism in the west is now extremely difficult. Not only do people not want to hear about the Gospel of Christ, but today they envisage it as mythology for stupid and needy people. Just last week I had a conversation with a professional, non-Christian lady about the Lord and she proclaimed that such a story today would not be entertained for a minute and would be consigned to the level of fairy stories. There was no place for God, miracles, resurrection, sin, hell, punishment or even an after-life in any thinking person's agenda.

¹ Such as Scott Lively, Caleb Lee Brundidge, Kevin Swanson, Lou Engle and Don Schmierer. Lively boasted that one campaign was 'a nuclear bomb against the gay agenda in Uganda'. Uganda is now debating a bill that could introduce the death penalty for homosexuality. Rick Warren has a Ugandan protégé (Martin Ssempe) who preached aggressively against contraception.

As a result of this difficulty, hard-line American preachers are now targeting Africa to receive their message. New recruits and new sources of finance are more likely to come from areas where there is less secularism.

Why are people less receptive to the Gospel and how does this affect Christians?

There are a number of reasons which all work together, but I will centre upon just a few.

Leadership hypocrisy

People are sick of hypocrites. Especially in America, it has been a necessity for politicians to pretend to be Christian and to promise to pursue a Christian-based agenda. This had traditionally been because the vast majority had always been Protestants. The Christian right-wing 'Moral Majority' had enormous clout in pursuing Republican policies and this group had to be courted by potential presidents. But even in Britain the last three Prime Ministers have affirmed a Christian heritage.² However, the scandals, lies, unrighteous laws, injustice and illegal wars have blighted supposedly Christian leaders.

Over the years it has become more and more obvious that supposed Christian presidents / Prime Ministers were far from being Christian at all; they bore wicked fruit. They were plagued by personal immorality, fraud, greed and lying. They pursued policies (in the name of Christ and using Biblical jargon) that time proved to be illegal, unjustified and deeply immoral. In the case of the Iraq war, it is now clear (to many of us it was clear beforehand and we wrote upon it) that GW Bush was determined to have his war for personal, imperialistic and capitalistic reasons, whatever the cost, and that Blair was prepared to pervert the truth to follow him, deceiving Parliament. Blatant lies were used to foment this war. Intelligence material, that was known to be fabricated by British, French and German intelligence services, was egregiously used in congress and stated to be firm fact.³ Despite knowing that Saddam was the enemy of Bin Laden, the American people were told that Iraq was the base for Al Qaida and retaliation for 9/11 was called for.⁴ We could go on. The result - over one million people died (very conservative, politically prejudiced estimates say over 100,000; academic surveys say many more) and the country was plunged into chaos with the result of a Shi'ite power centre allied to Iran. This is to say nothing of unbridled hatred against the west and a new jihad, which led to the London bombings and ongoing terrorist attempts. The subsequent US Patriot Acts and Homeland Security policies were also hated for their development of a 'big brother' state in the US.

Informed Christians, although slow, eventually found such hypocrisy untenable and this led to questioning all the church leaders who promoted unbridled support for the war, pursuing a sinful racist jingoism. However, outsiders could see this hypocrisy much quicker than believers and wanted no part of it. The church was tarnished by the behaviour of supposedly 'Christian' politicians and 'Christian' agendas. When approached by a Christian with the Gospel, many people now respond by pointing to the hypocrisy that prevails in

² Tony Blair claimed to be a Christian and later converted to Roman Catholicism, though he submitted to mystical pagan and new age practices and doctrines; his government also perfected the art of political lying. Gordon Brown made much of being the son of a Presbyterian minister. David Cameron considers himself an Anglican; the Church of England has always been known as the Tory Party at prayer.

³ Such as the multiple lies of Iraqi defector 'Curveball', or the fabrication exposed in the 'Plame Affair'.

⁴ Meanwhile the US consolidated its alliance with repressive Saudi Arabia despite the fact that the majority of the publicised 9/11 hijackers were Saudi.

western 'Christian' politics and insist that such a religion is hateful. They tend to tar everyone with the brush they aim at political hypocrites.

Secularism in education

A book could be written on this subject alone. We will centre just upon evolutionary theory. A survey for *Answers In Genesis* showed a key reason why modern teenagers, formerly sound Christians, were leaving the church in droves. It was that the sheer pressure of evolutionary propaganda in colleges was too much for them. Having accepted creationism since infancy, they were not prepared by home or church for the withering attack on creationism whilst at college and university. Being vulnerable and away from home for the first time aided the susceptibility to peer pressure. The statistics suggest that this is the number one reason why churches are losing a generation of people; the very generation needed to keep the church going in twenty years time.

But this promotion of secularism is not just found in college but is thrown at children everywhere from an early age. Schools are full of evolution, liberalism and sexual openness. The television constantly disperses evolution, and other secular ideas, and demeans Christianity as a joke. These lies are published as axiomatic facts and the fact that a schoolteacher will support a lie taught on television adds to the weight of propagandising kids to believe the lie. The influence of a David Attenborough or a Brian Cox on the young, through TV documentaries, cannot be overestimated. A Christian response to the drip feed of lies is never accepted.

We must remember that for many years the British education system (and the BBC for that matter) was founded upon Christian principles and Christianity was established in the curriculum and assembly. In the 50s I was taught to remember the Ten Commandments and numerous Bible passages in primary school alone. Divinity was a compulsory subject in many grammar schools along with Latin. People today would laugh to consider that Christianity was once a core subject along with English and Maths. It is now more likely that children will be taught a foreign religion or a metaphysical subject instead of anything remotely Christian. In addition, only faith schools will have any sort of Christian content in assembly.

The church and parental catechising has not been up to the mark to contend against all this. Indeed, both have utterly failed their responsibility. Most parents these days don't even catechise their kids at all and few even bother with family devotions, considering it as 'legalism'. In fact Scripture demands that parents teach their children; that is their job. But churches have also been more concerned to promote their own agendas, and many of these have been to establish the organisation and generate money. Thus both churches and parents have avoided their chief responsibility - to nurture, edify, cherish and protect their kids in basic truths. Without being prepared, children have been let loose into a world that devours them.

Those who are in the world are already propagandised to the point that the Gospel falls on deaf ears. Modern people feel too sophisticated and intelligent to even consider the claims of Christ. They are brainwashed by supposed science that is never questioned and that has no balanced alternative view taught (which is not scientific).⁵

⁵ The chief subjects that this affects are: the gradual evolution of life by chance from slime, modern cosmology (the Big Bang), and uniformitarianism in geology. However, there are a number of other subsidiary subjects affected also, such as: the unproven tenets of modern astronomy and physics (e.g. Dark Matter, Dark Energy, Inflation, anti-matter, parallel universes etc); the speed of light, geocentricity etc.

Superficial churches

Superficial practices in churches will only hold people for a limited time and the more mature older people will eventually tire of them. As more church leaders abandoned proper exposition of the Bible, numerous shallow practices arose to occupy the minds of the congregation. Sermons became short chats filled with jokes or just a few 'precious thoughts'. Often they were just PowerPoint presentations, sometimes just lifted from the Internet. 'Worshipping' to the backing of a big and loud band occupied more than half of the meeting, which was just usually a fleshly jamboree. Some churches included various sorts of dances, supposed to be spiritual; others added drama and light shows. Staged sacramental events often occurred that were supposed to aid spirituality, such as lighting candles, building mounds of stones, waving flags, marching round the room, blowing a ram's horn trumpet, knighting people with a sword, burning notes that listed burdens and so on. All this sheer nonsense was worse than paganism, it was just piffle;⁶ hollow, useless dead works.

Even those that should have known better, who initially fell for this rubbish, eventually got to the point where they realised it was superficial flesh. However, many visiting non-Christians have more sense and see the sheer superficiality of much that passes for church these days and want no part of it. The world is sometimes wiser than the church.

The tolerance agenda

One of the ways society brainwashes people is to use a policy that on the surface appears to be altruistic but in reality is controlling. Thus various strands of society are protected in a way that demands universal acceptance; for instance the Gay lobby has been very effective at establishing laws to undergird their policies. Something that was a criminal offence 50 years ago has now superseded heterosexual marriage in legal protections. A couple committing heterosexual sex acts in public will be arrested but homosexuals will not.⁷ Married couples also pay more tax than living-in couples.

Thus any person whose religion condemns homosexuality or promiscuity as a sin is automatically considered to be intolerant and hateful. Few will listen to any promotion of their Gospel; indeed some have labelled evangelical Christianity a hate crime in and of itself.

These are just some of the reasons why modern people are not interested in listening to the Gospel.

Distraction and hedonism

People in the world have always been susceptible to distraction from serious consideration of their eternal state, but there has never been a time when distractions overwhelm people as they do today.

For decades now there has been a slow process of dumbing-down people so that they care nothing for important matters. An authoritarian government will promote this to have unthinking, obedient citizens who never pose any serious threat to unpopular policies. The more the country just plods on like foolish sheep the better the establishment likes it. A thinking, agitated, examining society is a threat to overbearing governments.

⁶ A mid-19th century word meaning nonsense.

⁷ There is a seaside walk in Brighton that is now off limits to families walking dogs because it is filled with homosexuals having sex in bushes. On Gay Pride marches in Brighton, there were men committing sexual acts as they went through the town in the open.

In the past, young people had various events to focus their thinking, such as football matches on a Saturday or pop records and discos. Older people had soaps, first in book form, then on radio, then on television. However, today even from a young age kids are overwhelmed with things to soak up all their spare time, and even sleep time. Computer game consoles are so over-used that kids end up in hospital with repetitive strain injuries; some children spend several hours a day on such like. Smart 'phones occupy the minds of most kids constantly. It is now common that children and teenagers are texting or 'kicking' friends 'till they fall asleep at four-o'clock in the morning. As these kids grow up they continue in being absolutely distracted by these, wii games, Facebook, Twitter and other brain-killing modern inventions. These technologies are also accessed to watch pornography, itself a subject that overwhelms people.

What all this does, which is part of a general dumbing-down found in all media, is to distract people away from important issues and seeing what is actually going on in the world. Most especially, it turns their minds away from considering the glory of God all around them or listening to their consciences, which convict them of sin. Society is filled with mind-dead zombies⁸ that care more about a story-line in their favourite soap or topping the list in a Nintendo game. Worldly distractions now occupy the minds of many people nearly 24-hours a day. People's whole life is centred in illusory web worlds, from which they emerge only when they have to. The focus on self-satisfaction (by any means) now has overtaken any historical consideration that people used to have on an afterlife.

Thus, when they come across the Gospel in some form, it is immediately dismissed as having no relevance to their cocooned, obsessive, hedonistic world.

The British situation

Now the situation over here is worse than in the US and has been for some decades. Even in the 90s church statistics were showing that people were leaving churches at the rate of over 2,000 a week. The only growing churches then were Pentecostals and Charismatics that were either growing by agglomeration at the expense of other churches (which accounts for the white middle class Charismatic churches) or by immigration (which accounts for the rise of black African Pentecostal churches).

However, it appears that even this growth is either slowing down, or in some cases, has gone into reverse. As Charismaticism is exposed for what it is, eventually mature folk leave. The problem today is that the dissenting situation is so poor that these people have no church to go to.

The traditional place for conservative Reformed believers in England was the FIEC independent churches, the Reformed Baptist churches and a few other dissenting folk. What has happened in recent decades is that many of these have slowly adopted Charismatic methods to some degree. These include using popular choruses instead of hymns, establishing a pop music band at some level, ecumenism with questionable local initiatives and having a more mystical Charismatic style worship time. Added to this has been a general downgrade in preaching and a lack of reliance upon the Bible, combined with a corresponding increase in psychological counselling (usually by women not under direct eldership authority).

⁸ It is an act of satanic irony that the media is absolutely obsessed with stories of people who are alive but dead; a commentary on the modern world. Many best selling books, plays, TV dramas and films feature zombies, werewolves and vampires. It is possible to find a programme about such virtually every single day on British TV.

As mature people left Charismatic works they searched for places to attend and found exactly the same weakness (though less obvious) in these churches also. If they found a more conservative church, the chances were that this church was dead as a doornail, hidebound with traditionalism, dead formalism and reliance upon certain men (not always men in ministry).

What people want is a church that is committed to the truth of God's word and that meets according to Scripture. People cannot find such a church. People from all over the country ask me, all the time, for advice as to where they can meet. They have searched their area and can find no sound church. They are not isolated because they want to be but because they cannot find safe fellowship. Sadly I can rarely help them as the churches I could support (even with reservation) can be counted on one hand. In recent years I have also found the same problems in a number of other countries as well; all over the world genuinely godly people are discovering that they cannot find a safe church to meet with.

Then there is the problem of the ageing population of congregations. Even those churches that I could not thoroughly recommend,⁹ but have otherwise tried to stem the tide of error and mysticism, are usually kept going by a small group of old people. I know of conservative churches that only have five to ten members. Even those with fifty are usually composed of 90% over 70-years old. The remaining Strict Baptist chapels that used to be found in every town and hamlet (and are now plush houses) are reduced to less than 200 active chapels in the whole country and most have a mere handful of people in their 80s. In the next ten years all such churches will die out. There is no uptake of young people to the cause of Christ any more (with a few exceptions).

Added to this is the problem of those few decent churches with a godly ageing pastor. I know of churches, and my friends know of many others, where a small but solid church is about to vanish away because the pastor is sick, in his eighties and needs to retire. These leaders just cannot find suitable replacements.

What is the cause of all this?

As usual, with such a systemic failure, there are a wide variety of reasons of such a serious decline; indeed I have written on these many times.

The overriding cause is a simple law: if you ignore or disobey God's word regarding church matters then the church will ultimately collapse or just become redundant. The modern church has done this on a plethora of issues.

We do not need to expound all these again here. The chief practical problem is that churches rely upon men instead of God. Conservative churches put their trust in a senior minister who can preach well, and thus they ignore the truth about equal eldership teams, body ministry, one anothering, accountability and mutual edification.¹⁰ Independent Pentecostal churches follow in this error but magnify it. Charismatic churches put their trust in a new form of archbishop, falsely called an apostle, who runs his many churches by strategies developed in his small cabal, an inner circle of trusted leaders submissive to him. This denies the vital truth of the priesthood of all believers (and church leadership) and is,

⁹ They may claim to be Calvinist but are really Amyraldian, following the Free Offer.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 12 explains the vital need of every member ministry according to gift.

in fact, a blasphemous form of religion since it puts a man in the place of Christ.¹¹ The error of following a man leads to a host of other errors.

The many other failures include:

- The devaluing or ignorance of Scripture.
- The prevalence of heretical teaching and the proliferation of dogmatic confusion.
- A failure to understand what the Gospel is.
- The denial of God's sovereignty in doctrine and ethics.
- The reliance upon a large building housing a large congregation.¹²
- The pursuit of money to fund unnecessary buildings, jobs, leaders, technology and practices.
- False worship that is based upon emotionalism, mysticism, passivity and suggestibility.
- Sensual religion instead of spiritual worship.
- The adoption of pagan doctrines and practices into church services.¹³
- Ecumenical methodologies.
- A failure to emphasise what sin is and the corresponding acceptance of unethical behaviour in the congregation.
- Failure to teach doctrinally, and particularly, to teach children effectively.
- Traditionalism.
- Allowing women in leadership.
- Worldliness.

We could extend this list but this will suffice. Let us just take one example.

False doctrine

Eventually false doctrine becomes clear to most believers; though it is a mystery why so many hold to heresies for so long. The vast proliferation of heresies in the church has led to people being starved of the truth and weakened in their spirit. As people get older they begin to question more; lies that they accepted when younger begin to be perceived for what they are. Eventually people walk away or burn out.

For example, many families accepted the erroneous teaching of Bill Hybels regarding church life; that it was to be geared towards the world and attractive to the sinner – a 'Seeker-Sensitive' church. Thus, as we all know, normal church life was replaced with superficial chats, drama, light shows, entertainment, rock bands, dancers, etc. with coffee going on at the edges of the meetings. Good doctrine was avoided, sin was never mentioned and nothing threatening ever said to avoid putting off worldly people. In short, the church became utterly worldly; in fact marketing became more important than truth. Now despite the many criticisms, a lot of people fell for this, and especially families, because kids were entertained and not bored. However, surveys conducted by the Willow Creek church twenty years later showed that the effects wore off and mature families left the church in droves, eventually. This was because there was no strategy for edification, for Christian growth, for discipleship or for spiritual service; everything was geared solely to evangelism. The result is a lopsided church with lots of superficial people with no mature people to lead them.

¹¹ No man is in charge of any church at all, let alone hundreds of churches. The local church is led by a team of equal leaders working together in consensus with the approval of the whole body. Only Christ is the head of the church.

¹² The Biblical precedent is meeting in houses with small congregations that meet as a family and are able to practice genuine fellowship.

¹³ This was the net effect of Charismaticism and especially the Signs and Wonder Movement.

False doctrine not only damages people, it rots churches. Only the truth sets people free and only the truth builds up the church.¹⁴

The total failure of Charismatic aspirations

It is important to bring Charismatic leaders to account in these times. All their prophecies and promises have fallen to the ground. Since 1960 they have claimed that their form of religion was the panacea to all the world's problems. Yes, they not only claimed to solve the church's problems but also those of the world. A global revival was coming where the Charismatic church would rule the world and usher in a golden age. 'We are world-changers' they would sing and preach. Well the world they have brought forth is not the world that I want to live in. Apart from the total collapse of the church into spiritual, and now practical, ruin, the world around us is a much worse place than it was in 1960. No sane person would disagree and there is no need to list the reasons why.

Charismatic doctrines, such as a mystical baptism in the Spirit coupled with spiritual gifts, were supposed to bring a new era of spiritual power into church life. Instead it brought in a revitalised form of mysticism based upon passivity engendered through emotional worship. The softening up of people through prolonged music based chanting and exhortations from the front led to exactly the same sort of mysticism that prevails in false religions throughout the world. This is why, when this passivity was emphasised and prolonged (as in the Toronto Blessing), the results were exactly the same sort of phenomena seen in witchcraft, Kundalini Yoga (Hinduism) and shamanistic worship; i.e. uncontrolled behaviour expressed in laughing, crying, screaming, falling over as dead, writhing, roaring and other animal noises, and so forth. This incursion of paganism into the church was predicated upon John Wimber's exhortation to embrace eastern mystical thought, ('a new paradigm') or Yonggi Cho's new visualisation mediation method (stolen from Soka Gakkai Buddhism).

Gullible believers who put their trust unswervingly in their leaders without any testing of their claims (contrary to 1 Thess 5:21) fell headlong in idolatry and false religion and have not recovered until this day. The Toronto experience led to a proclivity to fall for further false teaching and practices even more easily. More and more nonsense followed (gold teeth, gold dust, auras, concentrating on gems for healing etc.). Eventually a false prophet (whilst committing adultery) could boast about kicking an old lady in the face with his biker boot and everyone would accept him as from God. This is virtually as low as you can get.

So all the vaunted prophecies and promises of the Charismatic movement brought the church to such a low state that no one could even identify a false prophet when he kicks a woman in the head to get rid of a demon!!!¹⁵

The institutional church is on the verge of collapse, so that even secular journalists are now talking about the demise of Christianity, and all this happened on the Charismatic church's watch.

¹⁴ Jn 8:32, 'you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.' 3 Jn 8, 'That we may become fellow workers for the truth.' 1 Tim 3:15, 'the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.'

¹⁵ Such behaviour has long plagued the Pentecostal church. Smith Wigglesworth punched a man in the chest so hard that he died three days later. Social workers have repeatedly had to deal with serious abuse against black children (and even deaths) which resulted from their Pentecostal parents trying to get demons out of them by physical violence.

Congregations filled with non-sheep

A final problem must be mentioned and that is the fact that, in my opinion, and the opinion of many others, modern churches are filled with superficial believers, mere professing Christians. This is especially true of Charismatic churches.

This has resulted from decades of preaching a shallow Gospel in content alongside superficial methodologies in practice.

The content is shallow in that it is not sufficiently Biblical and is based on various forms of false theology. Thus today we have (in order of deceit): Amyraldism, Arminianism, Moral Government theory, Pelagianism and forms of Socinianism. We have explained these many times and need not do so here. Most people today do not even know what these terms mean let alone how to avoid them.

For example, I have heard a well known preacher in a famous Charismatic church (that claims to be Calvinistic) stand up and preach that every person has the spark of God inside him and just needs to fan that spark into a flame in order to be saved. This is pure Pelagianism.

Key truths of the Gospel include the sovereignty of God, the responsibility of man to his creator, a presentation of the greatness of Christ as Saviour, election, total depravity, limited atonement, irresistible grace, the need for conviction of sin, grieving for sin, repentance and, above all, yielding to the Lordship of Christ. Today, some churches do not even believe that submission to the Lordship of Christ is even necessary for believers; that is how low doctrine has fallen.

Worst of all, many believers do not even use the Bible in their witnessing. They may refer to a number of subjects but rarely explain actual texts. In fact they may use a number of unbiblical statements, such as: *'give your heart to God to be saved'*, *'invite Christ into your life'*, *'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,'* etc. Few even realise that the book of Acts (a favourite of Charismatics and evangelists) does not even mention the word 'love' at all.

Apart from the lack of Biblical content in the modern Gospel, the methods of its publication are also unbiblical.

Chief among these is the invitation system, based on the new measures proposed by CG Finney in the mid-19th century. What this does is to push for an immediate response by someone being evangelised. This has led to various forms. In preaching the Gospel in a large meeting, it takes the form of getting someone to raise a hand in response, or to stand up, or to come to the front. Usually someone prays with this person and gets them to repeat a dictated prayer (an unbiblical method) – at this point they are told that they are Christians.

I have lost count of the number of people I have met who went through this and later fell away. What actually happens in this method is that someone is affected emotionally by the meeting, or the power of the preaching, and responds out of emotional pressure. At that point they are not actually able to do what Scripture demands since they are not being rational. God commands people to repent and this means making a life choice based on the facts,¹⁶ not acting upon superficial feelings that have no substance in the mind. The worst

¹⁶ Chiefly that I am a sinner and Christ is my only hope for forgiveness. Thus I choose to follow him and reject sin.

form of emotional manipulation is when the music is emphasised and the 'worship' time is what affected the seeker's feelings more than the preached word.

Those who get hundreds, or even thousands, of people to react in this way to emotional pressure in large gatherings are deceived at best or charlatans at worst. They take photographs of many people holding up their hands and get financial support from excited people sponsoring their ministry, but most of these 'converts' fall away. All crusade evangelists have proved that the majority of their converts vanished over time; even Finney who started it all. The Billy Graham organisation admitted that up to 95% of their converts feel away but even Finney (late in life) admitted that most of his revival converts disappeared.

Worse still is the tactics of the Alpha Course. This does not just rest upon superficial emotionalism but upon passivity leading to a hypnotic state. Claiming that they are effecting a baptism in the Spirit experience (itself a theological fallacy), they claim that whenever a seeker falls to the ground after a weekend of ministry (and a number of meals and studies) they are then baptised in the Spirit and automatically saved. Thus the common factors that you see in the published testimonies of such people are: no mention of sin, no mention of conviction, no mention of repentance, no mention of Scripture and sometimes not even any mention of Christ himself. Instead is a focus upon the Spirit and feeling effervescent in some mystical manner. The uselessness of this system is proved by secular journalists who fell down in this way and then went on to write that they were not Christians at all but enjoyed the mystical nature of the meetings. In this case the softening up is not just effected by emotionalism and mysticism but also by the effect of the community spirit and superficial temporary acceptance and friendship given to lonely people (especially students away from home).

As a result of these, and other errors of theology and practice, thousands of non-believers are filling seats in churches. Of course, over time, many of these people eventually leave (and while they are there they have loads of problems causing the need of unbiblical counselling methods) and this contributes to the drain of numbers we are now seeing.

The only way forward

Only by a thorough desire to be absolutely Biblical in obedience to God can the church have any hope in this time. Every human crutch has to be cast away, along with every reliance upon man and all association with the world. All forms of compromise have to be shunned and this requires a humble submission to let God's word speak for itself.

There is no fear in this; in all essential aspects God's word is crystal clear, even if they rub against the grain of human thinking. The Lord's people need to sit down and determine exactly what the church is and how it meets. Who leads it and how? What does it do? What doesn't it do? What is acceptable; what is forbidden? All these things are easy to find if one is humble before God and simply accepts what his word says. It is only when men take charge and bring compromise that things go awry.

I have written on these issues many times and will not rehearse them here; I will simply list some key points.

- The church is essentially a family; it is the household of God. It is not an organisation or a formal institution run on rigid lines. It functions like a family.

- It meets in homes and nowhere else (unless there is no home big enough for a small gathering, then a room in a hotel could be rented). This is to ensure that the principles of family can be met. Larger than a certain number, family principles collapse.
- It is an interdependent body. There is no centralisation, no focusing on one man but rather a place where everyone is dependent upon everyone else and all are dependent upon God.
- Leadership is only by a team of equal elders and no one else. There is no submission to any higher person or organisation. These men act like fathers in the meeting and not as lords. Leadership is, therefore, not like the world at all; leaders are not executive managers.
- Ministry is corporate and not single. Ministry is by gifted people, serving according to their gift. Elders oversee this but do not necessarily do it all. Teachers should teach, others may have exhortations and encouragements, readings and comments. Elders are a backstop to endure that all is according to God's word.
- The constituents of the meeting include: singing, reading Scripture, teaching, exhorting admonishing, encouraging, worship, thanksgiving, testimony. Women are not allowed to teach and must not take any form of authority.
- There is no instrumental music present in the meeting. Singing is unaccompanied.
- The centre of the Sunday church meeting is the breaking of bread, or Lord's Supper. This must be done every week and is done with reverence, remembering the Lord's death until he comes.
- It is helpful to share a fellowship meal before the meeting, but this is not obligatory. There is a distinction between the meal and the later time of worship round the Lord's table. Confusing these is a great error.
- Women should wear a form of modest head covering (such as a scarf) to demonstrate their submission to God's word and authority. They should also not participate in judging other ministry (a form of authority) but ask their husbands at home about any controversy.

Whether we like it or not, God will bring about home churches that will obey his word in the future. The current situation is merely the beginning of God's prophecy that at the end the church would fall away and the Lord may not find faith on the earth.¹⁷ The massive apostasy that has occurred in the last 50 years is but a demonstration of the proof of God's word.

The next major event on the horizon is the introduction of persecution against Christians by state bodies.¹⁸ Evangelicalism is already considered as a sect by the European Union

¹⁷ 2 Thess 2:3, 'Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.' 1 Tim 4:1-2, 'Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy.' 2 Tim 3:1-4, 'But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.' 2 Tim 4:3-4, 'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.' Lk 18:8, 'when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?'

¹⁸ Mk 13:9, 'But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.' Matt 24:9-12, 'Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.' Lk 21:16-17, 'You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake.'

and discrimination laws already mean that preaching the truth in some areas is illegal.¹⁹ As persecution bites, then all outward forms of institutional churches will either collapse entirely or will be corrupted into absorption with the state religion. The only bodies that could escape this onslaught will be house churches meeting in secret, as they have always done in the past.

Christ will build his church

Despite the gloom of the current situation, we should rejoice that the day of Christ is drawing near. The negativity of the church situation is but the fulfilment of Christ's own words and a sign that the end is not as distant as it was.

Despite the state of the external churches, Christ will build his church and not one elect person will fall away.

I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Matt 16:18

He will also bring his church to fulness:

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.' Matt 13:30

The kingdom of heaven is represented by the wheat in this parable and the wheat is not left to fail, but is harvested when it is fully ripe. Thus the church will be gathered when it is full. This means both that the last elect person is saved and also that there is a testimony of a mature church at the end (a field of mature wheat).

This church is not like the current churches formed by men and managed like businesses with a mixed company; it will be a Biblical church meeting secretly in homes and hidden from the world. As the institutional church continues to fall apart, God will gather his people into Biblical churches meeting in homes. This is where the final testimony will be, just as it was in the early church – home gatherings where people gather according to God's word.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2013
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>

¹⁹ Christian street preachers have been arrested in east London, for instance, for offending local Muslim shopkeepers.

Appendix

A summary of reasons why Christian faith is weak and where churches are failing today

Bible Versions

- The proliferation of multiple Bible versions causes confusion. It is possible to read a verse in two different translations and get completely different sentences; or to read a verse in one that is absent from another.²⁰ How can this lead to trust?²¹
- Some Bible versions are very bad translations (e.g. *The Living Bible*); a few are shockingly awful (e.g. *The Message*).
- Dynamic equivalence and paraphrase versions (e.g. *The NIV*) give false impressions of what the text actually says. Translating the thought, rather than the literal grammar, leads translators to give an interpretation rather than a translation. This adds an unnecessary element of human frailty to the text.
- It is not possible to do decent Bible studies based upon dynamic equivalent and paraphrase versions. This is one reason why doctrinal errors arise.
- The majority of modern versions are based upon Alexandrian manuscripts, which, in the view of this writer, are less accurate sources. Byzantine-based translations are to be preferred, i.e. the KJV or the NKJV. Of the Alexandrian based versions, the better ones are the most literal, such as the NASB.²²
- Some modern versions are developed by people with a theological axe to grind (note Arminian emphases in the NIV for example).²³

Church meetings

- Churches do not need a dedicated building since they are small congregations that meet in homes. Failing to observe this simple rule leads to a host of other unbiblical measures.
- Almost all churches fail to provide the basic requirements of fellowship (one anothering), which is the fundamental purpose of the church gathering.
- Modern churches usually fail to understand the interdependent ministries in the church. Instead they are top-heavy with formal, professional leaders.
- Charismatic style churches centre upon a mystical, emotional worship time dominated by loud bands. Biblical churches have no instrumental music at all.
- Charismatic worship is experience based (elevating the self, satisfying the self) instead of being a humbling of the self.
- Conservative churches are often hidebound by traditions of men.

²⁰ Alexandrian-based versions can omit the equivalent number of words as contained in Peter's letters.

²¹ For a fairly innocuous example: 1 Peter 1:2 KJV: Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. NRS: who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance. BBE: Who, through the purpose of God, have been made holy by the Spirit, disciples of Jesus, made clean by his blood: May you have grace and peace in full measure. The number of differences is significant. The BBE completely ignores the concepts of election, foreknowledge and sprinkling and introduces a concept not in the Greek (discipleship). In all three prepositions are different and grammar is different. More modern versions are much worse.

²² The AV (KJV; Byzantine text) and RV (Alexandrian text) differ in over 36,000 places.

²³ For example, the NIV translation of Ps 145:9b, that God is '*loving to all he has made*', is not found in the majority of manuscripts. Only one manuscript of the Masoretic text has this statement; yet the translators saw this as an opportunity to affirm that God loves everybody; a central Arminian tenet.

- Most churches are formalistic with a set liturgy.
- The sermon occupies a key place in the meeting and is the prime means, or the only means, of teaching the flock. There is no Biblical basis for this. [Teaching must involve questions/answers, discussion and application, in the manner of Jesus and Paul.]²⁴
- Most church meetings are based upon entertainment rather than equipping the saints. Charismatic churches use the worship time to entertain; conservative churches use a polished sermon performance to entertain. Some famous churches are really just preaching centres where no fellowship exists.
- Home visitation to hammer in key applied doctrinal and practical issues is vital and yet almost universally ignored.
- Most churches fail to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly – the very basis for gathering together.
- Almost all churches fail to function as a family, which is what God intends.
- Many churches break down into unbiblical smaller units to effect fellowship. Thus these meetings are usually led by someone who is not an elder and has no Biblical authority to lead. Worse still women are allowed to lead these groups. We have no right to restructure God's commands.²⁵

Worship

A further word needs to be said about worship.

- Many modern believers have very little understanding about what worship is.
- Most Charismatics, and many others, associate worship solely with music. But worship has nothing at all to do with music. Thus ladies iron the washing with a so-called 'worship CD' playing in the background and proclaim that they are worshipping. It is possible to worship whilst ironing but that has nothing to do with playing any music.
- Most Charismatics identify the gooey feelings they have whilst singing, accompanied by a loud band, as worship. It is not; that is just gooey feelings. Worship does not require certain sorts of emotions; in fact the best worship flies in the face of such things and occurs when everything is against the worshipper. Such as case was when David worshipped despite being stricken with grief over his dead son or when Job worshipped after being told that his children had all died.
- Worship is submission, plain and simple. It is submission expressed in some manner, such as bowing the knee or kissing the hand of a superior.
- Worship is to be distinguished from praise, which is the jubilant blessing of God by the voice or by giving in God's name.
- Worship in church meetings is quiet reverence to God in total submission to his sovereignty.
- The emotionalism present in Charismatic worship is very similar to the various types of pagan worship in false religions. These are also based upon manipulation of the feelings by rhythmic music, repetitive singing, long periods of standing up and direction by an authority figure at the front. The increasing suggestibility created by the music leads to passivity and then to mystical experiences from the old nature that is deeply rooted and normally suppressed. The longer this goes on, the more likely that behavioural changes will occur when the flesh is given into; this will often produce screams, crying, shouting, falling over and other exotic behaviour (depending on the emotional state of

²⁴ 'Preaching', as in a sermon, was used by the apostles for proclaiming the Gospel in public. In the church they taught using a variety of methods that all included discussion (e.g. home visitation, exhortations, systematic didactic teaching, catechising, admonishing, encouraging).

²⁵ Such smaller units are a response to the failings of the big church system. People want fellowship but cannot get it on Sunday.

the person). All such things exhibit a loss of self-control, which is the opposite of spiritual behaviour since the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Church leadership

- Almost all churches have an unbiblical leadership structure. The wide variety of these shows that they cannot all be correct. God's plan is leadership by a team of equal elders and nothing else. These are also known as pastors (shepherds), pastor-teachers, bishops, overseers, leaders, pilots, helmsmen etc.
- Most churches are dominated by a single man. This violates clear apostolic principles of church leadership but is, instead, very worldly.
- Many Charismatic churches are ultimately led by a so-called 'apostle' which is deeply unbiblical. No man can run a single church, let alone a number of churches. It fails to see what Biblical apostleship is, which is actually closely related to the idea of a missionary.
- Churches have multiple leadership functions (and titles) that have no Biblical basis at all.
- Many modern churches have women in leadership, which is unbiblical.
- Many churches do not have Biblically functioning deacons to oversee the needs of the poor. In fact, most churches ignore the needs of their own poor. Some independent churches are run by deacons, which is unbiblical (deacons have no spiritual responsibility but only supervise practical matters).
- Most leaders have salaries (sometime exorbitant ones) that have no basis in Scripture. Leaders must live by faith. Only itinerant workers, or a leader left with no time at all due to teaching responsibilities, should receive love gifts to aid sustenance. No leader should live at an affluent level of life-style far removed from his congregation.
- Many leaders have a management ethos instead of being fathers.

Apologetics

- Christians are insufficiently trained in apologetics to meet the exigencies of life.
- Christians ought to have sufficient background knowledge to make a good defence of: the authority of the Bible; the authenticity of the Bible; the resurrection of Christ; the flood narrative; creation; plus defeating the lies of evolution, geology, secularism and liberalism.
- Christians ought to be prepared to defend the ethics of the faith against the liberal and permissive ideas of the world.
- Christians ought to have a rough working knowledge of the major faiths and pagan sects.

History

- Christians are not educated in the important events of history.
- Christians ought to have a good working knowledge of church history, with a special focus upon the Reformation.
- It is helpful to have some knowledge of the development of doctrines in early church history.
- Believers ought to have some knowledge of the chief pioneer missionaries and the spread of the Gospel in history.

Teaching

Many churches fail in the following points:

- Teaching must involve proper didactic instruction to establish foundations.
- Teaching must involve explaining doctrine and not just interesting exposition.

- Teaching must focus on application so that people are trained in righteousness. They must learn what is right and wrong in any circumstance.
- Teaching must be modelled by personal example as well as being taught by a teacher.
- Teaching must centre upon the truth as it is in Christ.
- Teaching must always glorify God by giving Christ the pre-eminence.
- Teaching must seek to give believers an excitement about the word of God.
- A central teaching is to explain the sovereignty of God in all things.
- Teaching must include warnings about false doctrine and current deceptions.
- The ultimate aim is to equip the saints for ministry and to protect the weak.

Edification

- The prime means of Biblical edification (mutual encouragement, one-anothering, interdependent ministries) do not operate in most modern churches.
- Catechising of new converts is almost universally abandoned with the result that most believers have no solid doctrinal foundation at all. This means that they are easy prey for wolves and unprepared to distinguish good from evil.
- Catechising is vital for the young and new converts.

Counselling

- Many churches use a wide variety of counselling methods and ministries that are not only unscriptural but are contrary to sound Biblical teaching.
- The basis of many types of counselling is secular in origin. In some cases the roots of their training are both sinful and pagan (such as Freudian and Jungian psychiatry).
- Women are widely used as counselling therapists but the Bible forbids women counselling men or married couples.
- The practice of deliverance of demons from genuine Christians is unbiblical, as is a specialised ministry in this.
- Teaching is required to enable believers to deal with their own problems by prayer and Bible reading.
- Counsel through one-anothering is also an important resource that is not often tapped because most people are untaught, and thus unable to counsel effectively.
- People who are disciplined for their public sin are unable to fellowship with anyone until they have repented. This means that they cannot go and worship with another church down the road. Far too many churches today ignore this in order to gain more members.

Spiritual warfare

- The modern Charismatic version of this is essentially pagan and unbiblical (e.g. territorial spirits).
- The Bible does not focus upon fighting demons by using material methods (praise marches, shouting, hitting people and various sacramental notions).
- The Bible tells us that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. Therefore most demonic attacks are to change our thinking by various temptations; character training in the truth is the means to defeat this. This is why we must take every thought captive.
- Faith in God is a key weapon to deal with satanic attack but Charismatics place faith in mere men to deliver them from a supposed demon.
- Jesus continually used the objective truth to counter satanic attacks. Most modern Christians do not know the word sufficiently to be able to do this. This is a major failing.
- Sin does not need an exorcism but repentance. A genuine Christian that commits a sexual sin does not need deliverance from an unclean spirit but confession of sin and true repentance.

Evangelism and mission

- Few today actually understand what the Gospel is.
- The Gospel presentation is usually based on a number of unbiblical affirmations (such as, ‘God loves you’).
- Many conversions are false and produce merely professing Christians.
- Most church evangelistic methodologies are deeply flawed.
- The Bible is not used in evangelism to the extent it should be.
- Few today are properly convicted of sin and repentance is generally absent.
- Contextualisation, and other modern methods, are to be abhorred if they pervert the actual Biblical truth.
- Working with false brethren, hypocrites or heretics in mission is forbidden.

Money

- Taking money from the world in any form (including tax rebates) is anathema.
- Making continual demands for money from the congregation, especially for buildings and maintenance, is wicked. Even the world sees this as an aberration.
- Money must never be used by the body to pay for things that God does not sanction. This includes: wrong leaders, administrators, office staff, buildings, maintenance of buildings, high salaries of leaders etc.
- The first priority for the use of money by the local church is the provision for the poor and needy in the church. After that it is the sustenance of the poor and needy neighbours of the church. Most churches utterly fail to prioritise this.

Specific doctrines

We cannot go through a long list of important neglected or misunderstood doctrines; that would require a book, as there are so many; however, I will examine a select few.

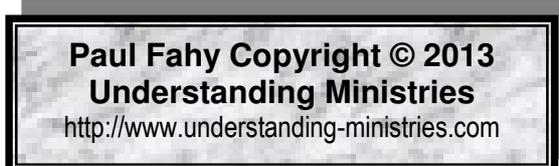
- *Understanding what it means to be a new creation in Christ.* Many people do not realise that they have died and are resurrected in Christ. Knowing this is vital to be able to put off the old man and put on Christ. If you can't do this, you cannot grow in grace and live a life of repentance to God.
- *Being dead to the world.* Many modern believers are thoroughly worldly and have little clue about having died to the world in all its forms. Most church leaders actually model worldliness in the executive style of management in their leadership.
- *Baptism in the Spirit.* All Charismatics, and many others, have a completely false view of this doctrine – which is not a mystical experience gained after conversion. In fact, there is total confusion amongst Charismatics and Pentecostals as to what this means and what it does. I have listed 17 different ways in which this doctrine is interpreted; I believe that other writers have found even more. There is absolutely no consensus on this amongst Charismatics because their interpretation is wholly false.²⁶ Baptism in the Spirit is what the Holy Spirit did to the whole church on the Day of Pentecost to apply what occurred to Christ in heaven on his ascension. By this, on Christ's command, he caused all the elect to die with Christ and be raised with Christ thus uniting all Christians in Christ as one body (1 Cor 12:13). Believers are no longer human beings due to this work but are a new creation in Christ.

²⁶ Some teach that it is an experience gained this way and that way; that the immediate result is this or that; that it effects this or that; that it is independently gained or that it is corporately gained etc. In fact the first modern teaching on it (in Wesleyanism) was that it was a baptism of love to enable instant sanctification. The Holiness Movement pursued something similar while the Higher Life people taught various things not quite the same. The Pentecostals (though claiming to be Wesleyans) taught something very different. Modern Charismatics teach a variety of things according to tribe. This lack of consensus is never admitted.

- *The Gospel*. The Gospel is rarely understood in a Biblical fashion and is misrepresented in a variety of ways by different denominations. Most apply it as something men do by choice. The doctrines of grace²⁷ need to be understood in order to preach the Gospel effectively.
- *Justification by faith*. Oddly this vital doctrine, on which the church stands or falls (according to Luther), is being attacked today by many who call themselves Calvinists in the American Presbyterian churches. These are those who hold to the Federal Vision heresy. In the UK the doctrine is being damaged by those who hold to the New Perspective of Paul. However, in most other churches the doctrine is just not being taught effectively so that most believers do not know what it means or why it is important. This is why Charismatics can fall for the Pelagian revival ideas of CG Finney and why others fall for the Arminian lies of campaign evangelists. Yet others build alliances with Romanism. All of these rest upon works righteousness, the opposite of justification by faith.
- *Reprobation*. This doctrine is mostly hated by Christians everywhere and yet is clearly found from cover to cover of the Bible.²⁸ It is part of what is called 'double predestination'; that is, that God predestines the end of both the elect to glory and the non-elect to condemnation. Failure to understand this leads to serious confusion in other doctrines (especially the Gospel) and to degeneration in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Though people superficially and nostalgically harp on about the Reformers, they fail to appreciate that both Luther and Calvin affirmed this doctrine strongly. Thus to claim that God loves everyone is absurd since he chooses those who are condemned. How can God love people he sends to hell? How can Christ die for people God has condemned already? In fact, people who deny this cannot read their Bibles since it states that God hates certain kinds of people.²⁹
- *Common Grace*. Following on from reprobation, the idea of a universal common grace emanating from the cross to all people to enable God to favour them is heresy. This doctrine arose with Abraham Kuyper in the late 19th century in order to enable an alliance with Roman Catholics in a political venture in Erastianism. It was subsequently remodelled slightly by later Dutch Reformed writers and spawned the Free Offer of the Gospel after 1924. All this was but Amyraldism re-tuned. Modern Amyraldism is a denial of Calvinism by positing a corruption of Calvinism united with Arminianism.
- *The sovereignty of God*. It seems that many Christians just hate this doctrine, yet they should glory in it. The Bible teaches that God is not only sovereign in creation (he chooses who will be saved and does all the work to save them – monergism), but God is also sovereign over everything that happens in life; the good things and the bad things. Thus God is sovereign over all natural events (including disasters) and all history.

We cannot take further space or this will become a separate paper on its own. Enough has been given to illustrate the point.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982



²⁷ Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the saints.

²⁸ For example: Rm 9:22-23; Prov 16:4; Jude 4; 1 Pt 2:8; Job 21:30.

²⁹ Ps 5:5-6, 11:5-7; Rm 9:13; Prov 12:2; Isa 27:11; Jer 16:12-13.