

Is the sermon the focus of the gathered church?

The use of the AV has engendered the idea that preaching is the central focus of the church, but this idea requires examination. There are about thirty Greek words used in the New Testament for the proclamation of God's word, which are almost all translated by the AV as 'preach'. No one disputes that teaching from God's word is crucial in church life, but the means whereby this is done today leaves much to be desired and singularly fails in its purpose. Even in sound churches very few people develop sufficiently in Biblical and doctrinal knowledge, largely because church members are not trained and equipped properly. Reliance upon the sermon alone to do this is a chief cause of failure.

We do not see the sermon as the chief means of teaching disciples in the ministry of Jesus, nor in that of Paul; neither is it modelled in the Acts. Preaching in sermonic form is an important method of evangelising outsiders in Acts, without a doubt, but it is not the way the church is equipped. The key means of teaching and equipping saints in the apostolic church is by:

1. *Didactic teaching* in a dialogue format (Acts 20:7; note Jesus' ministry with the disciples).
2. *Corporate ministries* where various people teach through spiritual gifts and even by singing. This is edification by encouragement, prophecy (revelation in the early church which had few scriptures, powerful spiritual teaching today), exhortation, example and admonishment (1 Cor 12, 14).
3. *Informal teaching* in homes (catechising families and new converts; Acts 20:20).
4. *Personal instruction* (discipling; 1 Thess 2:10-11; 2 Tim 2:2).
5. *Occasional addresses*, which are like an informal sermon (Acts 20:17ff)

It is impossible to make a NT case that the means of teaching saints is by one man standing at the front sermonising to all twice on Sunday. [Indeed one can't even make a case for two meetings on Sunday!] Defenders of the sermon always rely upon church tradition to make their case and fail to succeed in their argument because there is no apostolic precedent or command for it. There is also little historical evidence to support it either. The sermon (in the form used today as occupying half of the church's worship) did not arise until nearly 300 years after the cross and only became fixed in church experience after the Reformation. Sermons became established in the 3rd century with teachers like Origen and Tertullian. There is even little evidence in the OT to set precedence for the sermon.

A key reason for questioning the priority of the sermon is that it contradicts the example and teaching of the apostles on church ministry; of this there is no doubt. 1 Corinthians 12 alone demands that church ministry is mutual and corporate; every member is expected (and gifted in some way) to participate. Furthermore, church leadership is plural and equal; there is no such thing as a senior pastor who performs the entire ministry. The idea of a single man dominating ministry in front of a continually silent congregation is utterly opposed to the whole teaching of the NT. The idea of such a thing is opposed to the church's focus upon Christ, as being spiritually present in the body; instead the modern sermon focuses the church upon men.

The historical development of the sermon

It stems from pagan sources

The origin of the sermon, as we know it today, stems from the pagan Graeco-Roman practice of rhetoric. Displays of these speeches were like a theatrical performance to the Romans and the Greeks and it was a technique used as the basis for education. Gradually style and performance became more important than the content of argument, persuasion and discussion, and speeches became based on emotionalism and sophistry. The gradual debasing of rhetoric took place in the later period of the Roman empire, just when the sermon came to prominence.

Many of the church fathers were trained in rhetoric before they became preachers (e.g. Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine). This was not necessarily bad in itself as a technique, but pagan ideas were already corrupting the Gospel by 100 AD (e.g. Clement of Rome). Although Paul had clear understanding of pagan writings and philosophies, his explanation of Christian truth was not dependent upon rhetorical conventions (1 Cor 1:10ff), so we must withstand reliance upon methods which endanger the sanctity of truth.

It developed alongside the decline of true Biblical ministry and church structure

The development and regular practise of the sermon came at a time when:

- Supernatural spiritual gifts gradually vanished.
- Communal ministry gradually vanished ('one-anothering').
- The church became more organised, structured and formal, especially after the Edict of Milan in 313 when imperial persecution ceased and churches became mixed.
- Churches stopped meeting in homes and took over basilicas. Buildings became the focus of money and testimony. Intimacy was lost and mutual ministry became impossible to continue.
- Church members were separated into clergy and laity. Ministry became institutional (clerical) led by monarchical bishops ruling over the laity.
- Biblical interpretation became fanciful (especially with Origen's allegorising).

Thus the sermon was gradually accepted along with the domination of the local church by one man. Genuine Biblical ministry seeks the actual equipping of the saints to function; sermons too often become an end in themselves.

The Reformation

The sermon was particularly used by God in the Reformation because of the desperate need of multitudes of common people for teaching and knowledge. This was an exceptional time to bring the church out of darkness, corruption and control by Rome. The sermon was the most effective way of communicating basic truths to many people (inside and outside the church) in the quickest possible time. It should be remembered that the ordinary citizen had virtually no knowledge of the Bible as access had been denied him by the Roman Catholic Church. On occasion, Martin Luther was able to completely reverse declining church/social situations by force of preaching alone. For instance, when he returned from 'captivity' at the Wartburg Castle, he completely restored order by preaching solidly everyday, convincing all, both religious and secular authorities, of the correct way forward.

We should also remember, however, that preaching was not the only means of establishing believers in the Reformation and the times which followed. Printing had recently made the distribution of books, pamphlets and tracts relatively cheap and easy. The Bible was also now freely available in vernacular tongues. Luther's translation of the Bible into German

and Calvin's release of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* had a profound influence upon Europe. The release of the Authorised Version in English also had huge consequences, both in religious and social life. Puritans felt that reading was enormously beneficial in promoting godliness; in fact some felt it was a better method than preaching, because the individual could go over and over teaching at his own pace (e.g: Richard Baxter and Thomas Brooks made this point).

So the importance of the sermon in the Reformation was due to the exceptional circumstances, but even then the chief means of teaching people deeper principles was through reading the many tracts, pamphlets books and lectures that were published. Calvin's sermons were definitely more valuable in the printed form than in the original speeches. Furthermore, the Reformers were apostolic in their ministry, being very involved in catechising from house to house and counselling families in person and by letters.

References regarding preaching in the church

Even in evangelising, Paul often used methods other than a sermonic form. For instance he used argumentation, debate and persuasion, which required some form of interaction with his hearers. But even if we accept that the sermon was a chief means of outreach, we have no idea about the form and cannot read the modern practice back into history; in fact the sermons of the early church fathers were much interrupted with questions, responses, discussions and much else. We have no idea about the style, length or stance of a NT speech for instance. Examples of speeches in the NT must be approached with caution because it is clear that these were edited; some are summaries. Furthermore the Greek words used sometimes do not indicate a sermon at all but rather a discussion or interactive speech.

Dialegomai

Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke ['preached' AV] to them and continued his message until midnight.
Acts 20:7

'Spoke' = **diale, gomai** *dialegomai*, Strong's number 1256 meaning: to think different things, mingle thought with thought; to ponder, revolve in mind; to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss. It does not mean 'to preach' in the modern sense, but has the effect of meaning discuss. Clearly, Paul's long speech lasted hours and involved much discussion. [Note: the Alexandrian type text used in modern versions omits this word.]

'Message' = *logos* and in this context simply means speech, not a prepared message.

Paul's conversational style is certainly affirmed in verse 11 by the use of *homileo* ('conversation'). 'Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.' Furthermore, this conversational style is even consistent with contemporary Jewish rabbinic practice.

Euaggelizo ['to announce the good news']

As well as occasions in the Gospels, there are 42 occurrences of this word from Acts onwards and they are all evangelistic. It is usually translated as 'preach' in the AV. Exceptions are good social news (1 Thess 3:6); and a good message from God to his prophets (Rev 10:7).

Notice the distinction between teaching and preaching the Gospel in Acts 5:42. In the early church there was teaching (*didasko*) to edify the saints and preaching the Gospel to outsiders.

Kerugma

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 1 Cor 1:21

Kerugma means, 'a message proclaimed or heralded'. Again the context is evangelism; its purpose is to save those who believe. However, we are told nothing about the format of this preaching but Paul distances himself from Greek rhetoric (see context).

Kataggello

Him we preach, warning every man and teaching [*didasko*] every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Col 1:28

Kataggello [**katagge, llw**], Strong's 2605, means to announce, declare, promulgate, make known, to proclaim publicly, publish or sometimes 'to denounce, report'. Paul's methods are known from Acts and his letters. He taught the church intimately, as a nursing mother (1 Thess 2:7), using several forms: persuasion, argument, admonishment, didactic teaching, personal counselling in homes and so on. This was his teaching of men in all wisdom, wisely applying the method to the individual or group. There is no sense of a formal sermon being referred to in this verse.

Clearly what Paul is saying here is that he proclaimed or declared Christ, by teaching men didactically, through various means, applying wisdom to tailor the method to individuals for the best results. The objective is the perfect, or complete, training of the individual to be like Christ. Modern sermons are unable to do this training unaided by other means.

Note also that *kataggello* is also used of the Lord Supper (1 Cor 11:26) being a declaration of Christ's death. There is no sermonic form in the Lord's Supper, yet the meal itself is a proclamation of the atonement.

En logo

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine. 1 Tim 5:17

En logo can be translated several ways: 'in word', 'in speech', 'in the way one converses', for example and it appears in several contexts (1 Cor 4:20; 2 Cor 6:7; Col 3:17; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Tim 4:12). Here the labouring, or becoming weary in the word, clearly refers to expounding the scriptures; but there is no indication of how this is performed. It can equally apply to catechising privately as to didactic teaching of a group.

Didasko

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Tim 2:2

We have already mentioned this word in passing; **dida,skw** *didasko* (Strong's 1321) means to teach; to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them; to be a teacher; to teach or instruct; to instil doctrine into someone. The word does not explain how this instructing is done, merely that it is done. Catechising at home is didactic instruction as is personal counselling to impart doctrinal information. It does not necessitate formal preaching from a lecturer.

Kerusso

Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince [lit. 'reprove'], rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching [*didache*]. 2 Tim 4:2

khru,ssw kerusso (Strong's 2784) means to be a herald; to proclaim with authority which must be listened to and obeyed; to publish, and is chiefly used of the public proclamation of the Gospel made by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles and their delegates.

Kerusso is mainly used of the proclamation of the Gospel to outsiders in evangelism but many expositors apply this word here to church meetings; however, there is no reason to do this. Paul is applying counsel to Timothy as a church leader and an apostolic delegate. Timothy's ministry was both as a teaching elder in Ephesus and also as an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Paul is telling Timothy here to proclaim the Gospel as an evangelist and also to do the work of an elder, rebuking, exhorting and teaching. The preaching is to outsiders, the teaching and exhorting to the church.

Timothy is to be ready to preach, in season or out of season; in other words, to make the most of evangelistic opportunities as they arise. However, patience and teaching are constant ('all teaching' = all forms of teaching), but Timothy is urged to include rebuking and reproof when necessary. This exhortation by Paul was needed since Timothy could be timid (2 Tim 1:7).

Other texts used to support sermonic preaching

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 1 Tim 4:13

There is no indication of a weekly sermon in these words. 'Exhortation' is a summons, a calling near, which can refer to admonishment or encouragement. While it can refer to a persuasive discourse, it can also refer to the giving of solace, comfort or consolation. 'Doctrine' is the word for 'teaching' or 'instruction' and there is no qualifying of how this is conducted. Elders must ensure that there is the public reading of scripture, personal exhortation and doctrinal instruction in church meetings. Formal sermons are not indicated.

Examples of preaching

It is often claimed that there are many examples of sermons in scripture, especially in the NT, and this is used as an apologetic for the modern use of sermons dominating church meetings. NT books referred to include: Acts (Peter, Paul and Stephen), Ephesians, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter and Jude, plus reference to OT passages like Ezra's sermon.

While it is true that there are many sermons found in scripture, it is impossible to know exactly what form these took. Many were not to believers in church (e.g. Stephen's defence), or were an exceptional situation (Ezra's speech to the returning Jews). Many others are speeches to unbelievers (e.g. many in Acts). Sermonic material addressed to the church is harder to find and is debated. However, even if sermonic material is present in the NT letters, it still does not provide a precedent for the modern situation where a formal speech by one man at the front occupies 50% of every church meeting. What this claim does do is to contradict clear teaching about every member ministry in Paul's letters.

The failure of the sermonic method**It is ineffective**

The attention span of most people listening to a speech is usually less than ten minutes. Even the church fathers, who developed the sermonic form, admitted that they had little

long-term effect on Christians, even though they included (unlike modern sermons) interruptions and questions. For example, Clement of Alexandria admitted this failure.¹ Modern theologians, such as RL Dabney, also admitted at the end of their lives that perhaps only four percent of what they taught ever registered with their hearers. Any modern preacher knows in his heart that this is true. If it were not true, then the church would not be in the terrible mess that it is in today, where doctrinal knowledge is shockingly poor and errors abound on all sides. Those believers who develop well are the ones that engage in private, reflective Bible study over and above church meetings. Even modern champions of the sermon accept that it is a poor method.²

It focuses the church on men not God

The whole point of the local church gathered is to focus upon Christ and testify to angels the manifold grace of God. Thus the central feature of the meeting is to break bread where Christ's atonement is declared openly. It is no exaggeration to say that the church gathers chiefly to break bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17ff) and edify one another (1 Cor 14:26), and not to listen to a sermon. The variegated grace of God can only be evidenced by the contributions of the whole body, not one man (1 Cor 12).

The sermon, on the other hand, diverts attention away from Christ and places it upon a man. It is common for evangelicals to travel scores of miles to church in order to hear a certain man and avoid a local, less distinguished, preacher. It is also very common (in fact virtually universal) for the sermon to be the focal point of the whole gathering and for one man to entirely dominate all the contributions in the meeting. This is a catastrophe and entirely opposed to apostolic teaching on church ministry. This would be bad enough if people were well-taught, yet in most churches people are not taught at all.

There is also the great danger that the focus on men through sermonic ministry will lead to authoritarianism, despotism and cultism. This has repeatedly happened in history, especially modern Charismatic history, but Reformed churches are not immune to this.

It works against mutual ministries

The Biblical method of fellowship is mutual edification. This is the way the Sunday meeting is to be conducted, every member participating under the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit. Teaching is so important that the church, as required, ought to have a week-night meeting where one topic can be taught didactically and discussed with questions and answers in an informal setting. However, on Sunday there must be opportunity for all to share as their gifts allow under God's constraint, even though didactic teaching by an elder also occurs (with questions and discussion).

This is evidenced in practice in 1 Cor 14, theologically explained in 1 Cor 12 and emphasised in many other places (see appendix). In fact, Paul speaks about one-another ministry over 60 times in his letters. Many Reformed evangelical meetings have no one-anothering at all.

It distances preachers from the people

The elevation of the preacher causes people to believe that expounding God's word is a professional activity, and this diminishes their opportunity to become proclaimers of God's word themselves. This is the very opposite purpose of true leadership. God commands

¹ B J Kidd, *History of the Church to AD 461*, 1922, I, 405.

² Ian Stackhouse, 'Negative Preaching and the modern mind', *Evangelical Quarterly* magazine, 73.3, (2001) p249.

leaders to equip the saints for ministry (Eph 4:11-12), not discourage them from doing anything!

It leads to a passive audience instead of a participating people. The local church is God's household, God's family, and it is expected to be the reflection of the loving community relationships that exist in the Godhead. The purpose of the church is to manifest God and reveal his word. It does this in interdependent relationships and community, as the Trinity does. To reduce the people to passivity is a disgrace and denial of its function to reveal God. Weekly sermonic ministry, to the exclusion of membership participation, always induces such passivity, and this severely diminishes fruitfulness. Furthermore, it creates dependence. Folk become dependent upon a poor diet of sermons instead of a multi-format feast of many types of instruction overseen by plural elders. In Antioch there were five people who could declare God's word effectively (Acts 13:1), Paul was just one, to say nothing of those who encouraged, exhorted and shared other gifts.

This elevation also causes undue reverence for the preacher or senior minister. It is common to find that these are addressed in formal terms, such as 'pastor', and not approached by name. Again this is the opposite of Biblical practice. Apostles downplayed their authority; note that John called himself 'your brother' (Rev 1:9), Peter 'your fellow elder' (1 Pt 5:1) and Paul, 'a servant of Christ' (1 Cor 4:1). Leaders who insist on titles such as 'reverend' or 'pastor' (to say nothing of 'vicar' and worse) should reconsider. Jesus' teaching that leaders should serve and that the first should be last appears to fall on deaf ears today.

It engenders an atmosphere of entertainment (as its original Greek form intended). While criticising Charismatic churches for creating a musical entertainment out of supposed worship, many Reformed churches do exactly the same by entertaining a passive audience with weekly sermons.

Sermons fail to fit teaching to where it is needed. Faced with a large audience, it is impossible to tailor the instruction to the needs of all present. Some will require deeper, more thorough exposition, but this would be impossible for more simple folk to understand. Either one or the other is effectively missed. But this fails the very purpose of eldership teaching, which is to equip all. Frequently, young converts fail to grasp much of the sermon content as it is a big enough struggle for them to even know where Bible books are located. 'Equipping' (Eph 4:12a) combined with 'edifying' (Eph 4:12b) means to build up, as a house is built brick by brick. The word 'equip' means to bring to maturity and was used of setting a bone in place, refitting a ship or mending a net. It means careful training and continued instruction to build people up to perfection. Sermons cannot achieve this careful placing of the next piece of equipment above the last in an individual. Teaching must be tailor made.

There is no accountability. Almost no one checks to see if their sermon was effective in generating Biblical knowledge and practical application in all hearers. Rarely are people prepared to enable them to study the subject in advance. There are no questions allowed, and thus misconceptions are not dealt with. Errors in the doctrinal content or Biblical interpretation of the sermon are almost never confronted, despite Biblical commands to test everything (1 Thess 5:21; 1 Jn 4:1; Acts 17:11). Rarely is there any follow up; but even if some questions on the sermon's content are penned, there is rarely pastoral examination and counselling upon the answers. It is thus easy to see why there is such a terrible lack of understanding, judgment and discernment of doctrinal and practical issues in the church today.

Explanation of how to study the Bible practically is almost never given; at least not on a Sunday. People are fed personal conclusions regarding a text (even if wrong) with no proper explanation of how this conclusion was reached. People endure decades of listening to sermons but never learn how to study and make proper deductions for themselves. In my experience, it is common to find folk who, after 40 years of listening to sermons, cannot even articulate the Gospel properly. How can they be expected to witness to Christ?

In short, the sermon is a poor tool for education and can even be an agent for damaging the existing gifts and abilities of folk, who are discouraged from progressing by badly comparing themselves with the erudition of a preacher. After this they settle for being entertained week by week, seeing no other opportunity to minister the word. Only strongly gifted individuals, with the ability to study privately in depth, will significantly develop. Only even stronger characters would dare confront error in the respected leader's sermon. All of this is a denial of Biblical ministry.

Conclusion

The sermon is not commanded in the New Testament for use as the means of edification in the church, and there is no precedent for it as the focus of fellowship life. It is contrary to the New Testament methods of building up the body, which is by mutual edification (1 Cor 14) and its present form arose largely from a non-biblical tradition. Worse, it turns attention away from Christ and the Lord's Supper (which is often neglected for weeks on end).

Teaching is crucial, especially didactic instruction, but this takes many forms so that saints are properly equipped. Leaders must adopt Biblical practices to ensure that all God's people are properly developed in truth. The sermon cannot do this.

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

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2009
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>

Appendix 1

Examples of mutual edification in the NT

This can only be a mere sample of scriptures to make the point. Some long passages (such as all of 1 Cor 12 or 1 Cor 14) could be listed. We will not discuss the question of cessationism here; it is not relevant. What is important is that apostolic teaching encourages the gifts of all; whether some of those gifts have ceased is not in view.

Ministry is in the body, not one man

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. 1 Cor 12:4-12

Using spiritual gifts for the benefit of all

I wish you all ... prophesied ... that the church may receive edification. 1 Cor 14:5

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 1 Cor 14:29-31

... one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Eph 4:6-7

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Pt 4:10-11

Exhortation (stirring one another up)

Exhort one another. Heb 3:13

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Heb 10:24-25

Edifying one another (building one another up)

Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Rm 14:19

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thess 5:11

Since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, *let it be* for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel. 1 Cor 14:12

Let all things be done for edification. 1 Cor 14:26

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. Eph 4:29

Comfort one another

Comfort one another. 1 Thess 4:18

The use of many forms of ministry

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Cor 14:26

Ministry in song

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. Eph 5:18-19

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Col 3:16

Church growth and development is by the use of all members' gifts

... speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Eph 4:15-16 [Every joint is the individuals in the church and the relationship between them. The joining of the body is through the gifts of all. For growth to occur, everyone must do their share.]

The priesthood of all believers

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Pt 2:9-10

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Rev 1:5-6

This is important. There are no mediators between men and God except Christ. In the church all believers have access to God and can minister to God according to their gift, function and gender. Some restrictions are placed upon women who cannot exercise authority over men, e.g. by teaching (1 Tim 2:12). However, women have many ministries they can perform and can teach other women.

The concept of separating believers into clergy and laity is terrible disobedience to God's word. *Kleros* (1 Pt 5:3, 'heritage' AV) means all the people just as *laos* does (1 Pt 2:10). While Anglicans do this institutionally and formally, many Reformed, Baptist and Independent churches do this by implication. Charismatic churches do it in practice where special leaders hear from God on behalf of the people. All human titles of honour for church leaders are to be avoided (Matt 23:8, 10; 2 Cor 1:24) since they emphasise a split between special leaders and ordinary people in the church. Leaders are servants of all (2 Cor 4:5; Matt 20:25-27; Jn 13:14).

The principle of *koinonia* (fellowship, sharing, communion)

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Acts 2:42

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common [*koinos*]. Acts 4:32

Note that the phrase 'one another' is used about 60 times (at least 55) in the NT commanding us to serve one another in all things.

Appendix Two

Modern contradictions of early church practice

Early Church	Modern Practice
One people.	Clergy / laity split.
Active participation of all.	Passive congregation.
A team of equal elders.	A variety of clergy types: Charismatics have apostles, prophets, pastors, cell-groups leaders, congregational leaders etc. Anglicans have ranks of institutional clergy. Reformed groups have senior pastors, pastors, elders (who sometimes do not preach or pastor); some have moderators and superintendents etc.
Meetings in homes.	Various forms of dedicated and expensive buildings.
Seating in a house.	Pews (added in 13 th century) or rows of chairs, a modern replacement of pews.
Teaching naturally and informally in homes.	Pulpits or platforms (which originated in the 3 rd century).
Teaching via numerous methods, and people, supervised by elders.	Weekly sermons by the same man (usually).
Teachers encourage questions and discussion.	Sermons are uninterrupted.

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

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2009

Understanding Ministries

<http://www.understanding-ministries.co.uk>