

Why Christians are ineffective

Introduction

That the modern UK church is ineffective needs no proof; the evidence is everywhere. British churches are declining; some at a very fast rate. Those Charismatic churches that are not declining are stagnant, remaining at roughly the same numbers (or less) due to renewed student populations every year and sheep-stealing via conferences, or are experiencing slight growth through immigration (such as London's Black African Pentecostal churches). Most other churches are in steep decline. What is certain is that there is no large success in evangelism.¹

Then we have the problems of apostasy, faithlessness, unrighteousness, sin, wolves in the pulpit, misunderstanding the Gospel, false teaching, ecumenism, corruption, hypocrisy, compromise, a focus upon money, worldliness and so on; all of which prove that churches are ineffective.

All of this is the direct opposite of the early church, which grew at an enormous rate. Yet it had no church buildings, little money, no advertising, no established canon and no published Scriptures.² It was also persecuted and believers had little earthly security. There were no printing presses, no radio, no TV, no audio CDs or DVDs, and no Internet. Travel was limited, arduous and slow and there was no universal mail service.³ There was no instrumental music in church services and meetings were hidden away from public view in homes, woods and catacombs. Most of the early church members were slaves whose free time was extremely limited. Meetings sometimes occurred before dawn or late at night when they were not on duty. Due to persecution, it was even rare that a large hall could be rented for a Gospel presentation.⁴ Despite all these disadvantages, this church outshone all other ages in effective witnessing, because they did not love their own lives and comfort and trusted in the Holy Spirit.

So, the modern church is in deep trouble and we have evaluated the reasons why many times, explaining the false doctrine and aberrant church practices behind this. But here I want to centre on the subjective reasons why church members put up with all this. Why are people not rebelling against the modern apostasy in droves? What keeps modern people in appallingly bad churches doing nothing effective at all?

The lack of Biblical knowledge

This is the most important and most shocking reason – they just don't know the truth about Christianity and the church.

¹ Consider that there has never been a time when a supposed Gospel has been published so widely in history – on radio, on TV channels, on DVD and CD, on YouTube, on websites, in books and pamphlets, in many conferences and meetings etc. Yet the net effect is poverty-stricken compared to godly preaching by individuals in the open air (without amplifiers) throughout history.

² A few well-off people would have had portions of Scripture, such as the sayings of Jesus or some letters of Paul. Some Jewish Christians may have had some parts of the law. Hand written copies of documents were very expensive, even if the original (or a trustworthy copy) was available.

³ There was a very efficient imperial mail service so that a letter could get from Rome to Carthage in 24 hours; but this was not accessible to any but rich and influential people.

⁴ Paul's use of the Hall of Tyrannus was unusual, but suited to his purposes in Ephesus. Note that this was not for a church meeting but for evangelistic debate, then a form of entertainment.

We have covered this in detail many times. Suffice to say that the importance of Scripture is downplayed in most churches, apart from a minority of conservative Reformed churches, a few moderate Baptists and some Dispensational Charismatics (who have a distorted view of major Scriptural doctrines). Many who would claim to be Biblical, upon examination, are far from it. In fact, many such churches actually use Scriptural pretexts to push some prior organisational agenda that is often the opposite of Biblical doctrines.

When you actually evaluate the members of churches, even in those churches claiming to be Biblical, you find that there is no understanding of the Gospel (in fact they are filled with unbiblical ideas). There is no, or poor, understanding of justification, election, atonement and often completely false ideas regarding sanctification. Added to this, most modern Christians have a shockingly emaciated understanding of the body of Christ, Christian ministry, worship, edification and teaching. Almost no church catechises believers, especially new converts, and many in the church disparage the idea of the need to be a theologian (in the strict sense of having a rational understanding of the doctrine of God).

If we then stretch to the question of church practices, virtually no one has the least idea of what church is, what it does and how it does it. In fact, the vital doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit is universally misunderstood to mean a mystical post-conversion experience. This is usually based upon Wesleyan false perfectionist ideas (which spawned the Charismatic version via the Holiness Movement) instead of the baptism of all the elect into the body of Christ to be new creatures in Christ indwelt by the Spirit.

The priesthood of all believers is universally denied in practice, even by those denominations that affirm it in their confessions. All churches, from radical Charismatics to small Reformed denominations, have what is effectively authoritarian leadership where a single man dominates all – either directly or through a small leadership cabal. The idea of plurality and parity of a small eldership team over a small church is nowhere to be found – but it is the Biblical precedent. This is chiefly because most churches strive to be as large as possible, meeting in a dedicated building instead of the Scriptural precedent of the church being a family meeting in a house.

There have been previous times in church history when the people have failed to progress in knowledge of truth, of doctrine. Nevertheless, many in those times still held the Bible in high esteem and read it assiduously. Though they were lacking in doctrine, they were very devotional and loved the word of God. They may have erred in certain ways, but they deeply cared about honouring God and obeying his word, as they understood it. Furthermore, they fought against the rise of liberalism and modernism, defending the authenticity and inerrancy of God's word. They may have lacked instruction but they achieved in faithfulness.

Such is not the case today. There are leaders who deny that the Bible has any value whatsoever, claiming that modern 'prophets' have replaced the dead word of Scripture. By this they prove that they do not even know what prophecy and prophets are or their place in the New Covenant, which is very different from the Old Covenant.⁵ Even where the Bible is supposedly held in esteem, many church members just do not read it, or read it superficially and rarely.

⁵ Prophecy changed completely when the Holy Spirit began to indwell believers after Pentecost. Thus John the Baptist was the greatest OT prophet, but any New Covenant believer is greater than he (Matt 11:11). The externalism of OT prophecy (miracles etc.) is now gone, it is unnecessary if God dwells in us, prophecy is now to do with edification and encouragement in the Lord (1 Cor 14:3).

Though now internalised in Christ, the moral commandments of God are still active and need to be obeyed. If you do not read them, you cannot obey them. ‘Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven,’ (Matt 5:19). But worse than this, the key matter is that believers need to grow in the knowledge of God their Father. This is impossible without studying what he actually says.

Hear the word of the LORD, You children of Israel, For the LORD *brings* a charge against the inhabitants of the land: ‘There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land’. Hosea 4:1

It is tempting to enlarge on this but there is no space here. The clear point is that many evils arise from the fact that modern believers just do not know their Bible and, therefore, cannot know God or what to do in life. This is a guarantee of ineffectiveness.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. Hos 4:6

The closed social club mentality

What continues to shock me are the large numbers of people who understand the evils of the apostate church they are in but refuse to leave it; this particularly true of young families. The true reason for many of them, whatever they may say, is the social life that undergirds their whole family. Many churches, particularly Charismatic churches, are really just glorified social clubs in an area where the historic social gathering places have vanished.⁶

Modern churches have all sorts of clubs, meetings, and activities for all ages, but particularly for young people and kids. Many parents find that they are glorified taxi drivers every night of the week taking their children to this and that church club. The parents themselves design their week around the church meetings that they attend and have little time for anything else, whether parents or friends. In fact, it is quite common for modern families to have no friends or activities outside of the church.

In this situation the family becomes completely dependent upon the external services provided by the church and it is unthinkable that they could exist without it. This is dangerous for a whole host of reasons, but it is the main reason why many people find it impossible to leave their cherished church even if it has become apostate.

Thus they become completely ineffective. They are forced to disobey God, who says to those in apostate churches, ‘come out of her’ (Rev 18:4). Since they are disobedient to God they will never bear any spiritual fruit in their lives; evangelism becomes dry and unfruitful.

It is also common that churches that have this host of activities, attending to all sorts of needs, are usually the ones bereft of any real spiritual worship and fellowship. The activities and clubs are not places of ‘one anothering’ in the Lord, or exhorting one another to love and good works, but are often focused upon activities pandering to the flesh.

⁶ Pubs, Post Offices, Social Clubs, Working Men’s Clubs, and so on. Many towns have also lost their childrens’ services: Youth Clubs, Scouts, CCF, Boy’s Brigade, libraries etc. This is all part of a satanic plan to destroy the infrastructure of British society. Any evaluation of Britain in the last 40 years demonstrates that there has been a systematic destruction of the social infrastructure (talk to old people). This is no accident.

Churches that soak up every resource and every bit of time and strength of its people ensure that members have no time to actually witness to Christ amongst their friends or social circles (often because they have none). This means that everyone is ineffective in glorifying God.

As modern life becomes more decadent and alienating, young people and young families find that the social life of their church becomes the mainstay of their lives. They may claim that Jesus is their anchor, but in reality it is the social life of their church. You can prove this by taking the church life away and seeing how many would survive faithful. I have seen strong people leave an apostate church because it was unbiblical, only to go back again months later because they could not cope with the lack of services needed for themselves and their family. Thus they returned to something they had previously described as wicked and sinful, all for a social life. Such people will always be ineffective. They have sold themselves to worldliness and materialism.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matt 5:16

Worldliness

Now this is a huge subject, of which we can only scratch the surface. It affects the structure of the church, the meetings of the church, worship, the leadership and ministry of the church, the life of the people, the way kids are brought up and so on.

We have to start with a clear affirmation that friendship with the world is enmity with God (Jm 4:4); if you love the world you make yourself an enemy of God. This is an absolute principle that is almost universally ignored or misunderstood.

It is easy to criticise 'seeker-sensitive' churches that bring the world into the church and make meetings attractive to sinners by dumbing-down righteousness. It is also easy to criticise Charismatics who dumb-down worship and compromise with the world so that the meeting becomes mere fleshly entertainment for the soul (not spirit). But it is less palatable for Reformed churches to accept that their church meetings and structures are just as worldly, but in a different way.

Worldly church structure

Most churches, even conservative ones, structure their organisation and leadership in a human, managerial manner. Charismatics do this with a CEO at the top (apostle); a local managing director (local church leader); an executive (local elders); middle managers (house group leaders / office staff) and first-line managers (cell group leaders, clerks) followed by staff (members). But conservative churches also follow the world. They have an authoritarian manager leader (minister) and a variation of some sort of executive (elders or unbiblical ruling deacons).⁷ All of them rule from the top down; all of them deny the priesthood of all believers.

The Biblical pattern of leadership involves certain key principles, which leads to a simple local church structure:

- The local church is small.
- The local church acts like a family.
- Leadership is by a team of equal elders.

⁷ Deacons have no spiritual authority whatsoever; they are assistants to elders to help manage the financial and administrative affairs of the church to relieve pressure on the elders.

- Ministry is by everyone under the supervision of the elders; however, teaching is by those gifted as teachers (usually a pastor-teacher elder).
- Decisions are made by consensus involving everyone. This is not by vote (not seen in Scripture) but by discussion and submission to the mind of God mediated by the Spirit. This is possible due to the small meeting size and the humility of people led by the Spirit; problems are overseen by the elders. Acts 15 shows this in action, even though the size of this meeting is unusually large.

Thus the Biblical pattern is rule from the bottom up (or properly the body as a unit) not the top down. The world manages from the top down (whether it is commercial management, national government or military endeavour); but the way of God in the body of Christ is from the bottom up.

Thus most modern churches are structured in a worldly way and are led in a fleshly manner. Following the world instead of God's law means spiritual inefficiency.

Added to this basic flawed structure is a myriad of worldly practices that we cannot expand on in this paper.⁸ We can simply mention:

- A focus on worldly instrumental music when God's precedent is no instrumental music at all.⁹
- Meetings devoted to stimulating the flesh and the emotions in a variety of ways.¹⁰
- Worship as entertainment based on worldly features, whether conservative or Charismatic.
- Inducing passivity, leading to mysticism.
- Ministry that is centred in a single man instead of being the involvement of all.
- Authoritarianism instead of mutual encouragement.
- Using dedicated buildings to cater for large numbers.
- Centring the meetings upon sinners instead of Christ.
- Failure to teach effectively; ministry that is lightweight, jocular, and superficial with no doctrine or exposition.

I have just read, in a recent autobiography, that large churches in America have franchises operating in their huge church buildings, so that they become like a small mall (shopping centre). Thus a large church in the Mid-West, for example, will have a famous restaurant chain outlet on site. It will also have a famous coffee-house franchise on site. In fact the author even suggested that the annual church budget for donuts eaten on Sunday could feed a small Third-World country.¹¹ This is nothing but blatant worldliness. Such a 'church' has absolutely nothing in common with the first century apostolic church.

We could continue ad infinitum. The point is that the church is looking to the world in a large number of areas instead of God – and the net result is spiritual inefficiency.

⁸ Many have been thoroughly covered in my various papers on the church.

⁹ Show me one NT passage where the apostles give instructions on any instrumental music accompanying worship! The trappings of the Old Covenant have all been rescinded, and instrumental music was part of this ritual, cancelled system along with sacrifice, priestly garments, mediators and temple buildings. The modern pre-occupation is a striving to build a New Covenant religion on to an Old Covenant framework. Charismatics are especially guilty of this.

¹⁰ This varies from the opulent emotional drama of massed choirs, dressed up priests, organs, spices and cathedrals of Romanism and Eastern Orthodoxy to the sinful extravagant exhibitionism of Charismatic 'Toronto Blessing' type phenomena, which is based upon fleshly mysticism.

¹¹ Rosaria Butterfield; *Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*.

Worldly Christians

We could also develop the point that many individual Christians are also worldly, far more than at any other time in history. When I was a young believer it was common for Christians to shun even ordinary forms of simple entertainment (movies, dances, pubs, socials with unbelievers, parties). Now such things are virtually compulsory. There are churches that meet in pubs; church leaders that do stand-up comedy for unbelievers; believers that get routinely drunk, tell dirty jokes, swear, carouse, lie and so on.

Now I am not advocating legalism, and having a conversation in a pub is not evil. However, frequenting one and drinking to excess regularly is. Going to a social party to meet people and behaving moderately is not a bad witness, but attending a blasphemous, bawdy, rowdy party is. Watching a movie is not in itself evil, but watching a blasphemous movie is. There are churches that even consider 'mooning'¹² to be acceptable behaviour, not worth condemning.

Christians are meant to be distinct from the world. There is a way to be in the world and yet not of it, remaining righteous. Sadly, many modern believers are of the world and in it up to their necks. If you compare the lifestyle of many Charismatics with a worldly person it is difficult to spot any differences. They do the same things, go to the same places, read the same newspapers, swear the same cuss words, repeat the same dirty jokes, follow the same football teams and pop stars, sing the same songs, drink the same drinks, watch the same TV programmes, play the same video games, use the same jargon etc. etc.

Worldly Christians are not only ineffective, but they make themselves enemies of God.

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Jm 4:4

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. 1 Jn 2:15-16

Materialism and money

Continuing on the theme of worldliness we need to mention money especially. If you were to visit certain Charismatic churches periodically you would come to the conclusion that they are mostly after your money. I have spoken to unbelievers who have done this, visiting a famous Charismatic church occasionally for family events. Their one abiding memory - that this particular church only cares about generating money from members and visitors.

Such churches already demand (through peer pressure or worse) that committed members should 'tithed' their gross salary and that it must all be given to the church. Now this has not an ounce of support from Scripture.

Firstly, tithing is Old Covenant. It is an external, legalistic, inflexible mechanism that has nothing to do with the New Covenant.¹³ There is no command by the apostles that we must tithe. Under the New Covenant we are expected to live as though God owns everything we have, not just a tenth. We are to be at God's beck and call regarding what we give and

¹² Taking your trousers down and exposing your bare buttocks to cause offence. A wedding of a junior leader in a well-known Charismatic church had photos of the bridegroom and friends mooning pasted on the wall in the reception.

¹³ The fact that tithing was in operation before the Mosaic Law is irrelevant; so were circumcision, sacrificial offerings and a priestly system; but these were Old Covenant too.

whom we give it to. This means that committing money for a year is a denial of God's sovereignty over our lives; he may well want us to give to something unusual or unknown to us in three months time. If we fail we disobey God. We cannot commit to long term financial giving to one cause.

Neither is giving just financial. Too many people who are affluent just give a tithe of their salary and then act as if there is no further call upon their lives for sacrifice. God often calls us to give till it hurts to test our obedience. This giving may be of things other than money.

Tithing is also unfair. It is no skin off the nose of the wealthy but it can ruin the poor. Ten per cent of a small wage is enormous; especially in days of privation like today. But a tithe of £100,000 is not going to damage a rich person. I have known many poor church members struggle to pay the tithe that they believed was an obligation to Christians, with the effect that their families suffered unduly. This is made even more unfair by the fact that the tithe for Israelites was, in effect, income tax. Apart from census money, Jews before the monarchy gave their tithe to establish the worship system, support the priests and Levites and the upkeep of the Tabernacle. However, modern believers already have income tax, VAT, pension schemes, National Insurance, Council Tax and various utility bills to pay before they pay additional tithes. God is not cruel and does not demand that his children be squeezed for money.

Another point is that the overwhelming target for the giving of believers is not the place it goes to today. The giving of the NT church, as described in the apostolic writings, was primarily to the poor and needy. This was both in terms of collected money in churches and in works of charity. The giving to the church officers was chiefly in order to gather a collection to bring aid to churches elsewhere in famine (see: Acts 11:28-30, 24:17; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:19, 9:5).

Now it is true that there is some giving to church officers (1 Cor 9:14; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18), but this is unlike the system in place today.

Firstly, the only people who received from the saints were itinerant ministers who could not work and continue their itinerant evangelistic or church planting ministry, plus those few teachers whose ministry in the word dominated their time and restricted opportunities to work. This would normally apply to itinerant teachers helping several churches.

It must be stressed that the normal situation was that churches meeting in homes were small and had a plurality of elders; thus no one needs to be full-time.

Secondly, there were no salaries. Giving to leaders was as God directed in response to the prayer of the leader. There should never be any direct request for money for a leader, only for the poor. One of the purposes of living by faith is that it continually tests the man of faith. Salaries remove this necessary test. If everyone in leadership today lived by faith there would probably only be about 10% of leaders left in position – not a bad thing at all in my view.

Again, most of the ministries and offices that we see being supported by the churches today do not even exist in the Bible. How can anyone support such a man-made system that is unbiblical? Leadership of the church is only by a team of equal elders (supported by deacons as necessary for administrative purposes). In addition there are itinerant, cross-church officers (evangelists, apostles [i.e. missionaries or church planters] and prophets [i.e. exhortative teachers that bring revelation above instruction]). A good eldership team will include men with these gifts; however, only those who are itinerant need financial support.

But what do we see today?

The whole church is materialistic; virtually all its ministries are founded upon materialism in one way or another. Most of the church officers are of human origin with no precedent in Scripture. Thus these should be scrapped immediately (worship leaders, apostles ruling over churches, prophets ruling over churches, women leaders, house-group leaders, administrators, plus formal titles e.g. archbishops, deans, canons, cardinals etc). A huge part of church finances are wasted (that is disobedient use of money that belongs to God) in the salaries of such people.

All churches are based in buildings dedicated to their use, apart from some smaller ones using rented property temporarily. Both these situations are unbiblical. Any money spent on buildings, either in rent, purchase or maintenance, is a sinful waste of God's resources. Consider that some modern churches have spent over a million pounds just to purchase their building in the UK (in America it would be far greater). Such large buildings require huge sums to keep them going; just the heating bill in winter is enormous.

So, between the massive salary bill and the equally large property bill, most of the money squeezed from poor church members is wasted away in things that have no Biblical warrant. Just what do you think God thinks of this?

But then, because there is no money left over, none of the real things that God wants our money used for get attended to (except in a few cases). That is, the poor and needy are not the focus of the giving of the saints.¹⁴ This is not just the poor in the church but also the poor neighbours of the church. It is a great scandal, and an offence to God, that churches are wasting massive amounts of money on false leaders while there are real cases of poverty in church members that are being ignored.

All of this waste of resources displeases God and ensures that there is no spiritual blessing given to such churches. This is one reason why they are ineffective. How can God bless the work of the church if it is unbiblically squandering the resources that belong to God? God will not bless the left hand if the right hand is disobedient.

Now, if the giving of large sums to make an apostle affluent, or a senior pastor well-to do, is wrong, what are we to say of those people who have become fabulously rich off the church?

Today we have men claiming to be super-spiritual, able to perform miracles at the wave of their hand, able to make men fall over by blowing and such like. These men get inordinate amounts of money, often after calls for giving to their ministry (through various means: TV, conferences, church meetings, magazines, audios, videos etc.).¹⁵ Such men are so rich that they have attracted the attention of the American IRS. They have fleets of limousines. They have multiple extravagant mansions. Some even have, not one, but several Lear Jets. Some rich Pentecostal leaders have even attempted to build their own 'healing cities', while others satisfy themselves with their own 'healing universities'. Often such projects have come unstuck since even the fabulously wealthy leaders cannot come up with the continuing costs, thus coming under the Lord's prohibition of Luke 14:28-35.

¹⁴ I am excepting those good churches that, despite wasting money elsewhere, are providing food banks for the poor.

¹⁵ One Pentecostal charlatan at the Albert Hall demanded a 'tithe' saying that God had told him what to expect. When the money was counted (during a long meeting) he declared that it was short and commanded the stewards to lock the doors and ask for another round of giving until the whole sum appeared.

Then there are the TV evangelists. It seems that all these men do is perform like monkeys and ask for money. This whole caboodle is nothing but false spiritual pornography. But even their performances are sometimes fake. More than one leader has been caught using an earpiece, prompted by his wife or colleague by radio, to pretend to have words of knowledge. Other have used plants, that is, actors pretending to be sick who come on stage and get healed for a price. Elmer Gantry lives.¹⁶

This whole mess is devilish, pure and simple. All Christians should steer well clear of it. All those involved in it will be spiritually ineffective and those who give to it will not be blessed for it. All giving to such things is a disobedient waste of God's money.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.¹⁷ Matt 6:24

No fear of God

The fear of God seems to me to be entirely lacking from most modern churches – even those who claim to be Biblical.

It takes very little Bible study to discover that the fear of God is the foundation of a healthy relationship with God and an effective walk in the world. Let us just take a sample of the Scriptures on this matter:

Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. Deut 8:6

What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Deut 10:12

Who *is* the man that fears the LORD? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. Ps 25:12

The secret of the LORD *is* with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. Ps 25:14

But the mercy of the LORD *is* from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them. Ps 103:17-18

Blessed *is* the man *who* fears the LORD, *who* delights greatly in His commandments. Ps 112:1

Blessed *is* every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. Ps 129:1

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge, *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Prov 1:7

A wise *man* fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident. Prov 14:16

Thus, if we want wisdom, want to walk in the ways of the Lord, want to know what God requires of us, want to know God's mysteries, want to be in God's mercy, and want to be blessed – then we must fear the Lord first. Those who do not fear God are 'fools'.

There are Christians who say that they do not know what the fear of God is. This just means that they have not read God's word very carefully. There are hundreds of references to the fear of God in Scripture and the meaning of it is made very clear; all one has to do is

¹⁶ A Hollywood movie starring Burt Lancaster about a fraudulent Pentecostal revivalist.

¹⁷ 'Mammon': a Chaldee or Syriac word meaning 'wealth' or 'riches'; also, by personification, the god of riches.

read them. But apart from that, the Holy Spirit, in his guiding and sanctifying influences, teaches us daily what the fear of God is - if we are listening to him.¹⁸

The way to see if someone fears the Lord is to check if they are focused upon themselves or on God's testimony. Proverbs explains this at the beginning of many texts on fearing God:

Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, Because you disdained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, When your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD, They would have none of my counsel *and* despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies. For the turning away of the simple will slay them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil. Prov 1:24-33

People who do not fear God can call on him as much as they want but God will not hear them. The lack of godly fear here is evidenced in these ways:

- God called but they refused to listen.
- God stretched out his hands to them but they rebelled.
- They disdained God's counsel.
- They ignored God's rebuke.
- They hated knowledge (couldn't be bothered with Bible study).

The result of this behaviour is that:

- God laughs at their calamity.
- God mocks when they are afraid, distressed and anguished.
- God does not answer their prayers.
- They reap the evil that they sow.
- They are filled with their own fancies.
- The complacency of fools destroys them.

Now those who dismiss this as applicable to Christians in churches need to think twice. The full measure of this warning clearly applies to unbelievers – but unbelievers who appeared to be godly and went through the motions of being in the assembly have often been accepted as believers until some later fall. I have known people, intimately, who gave every impression of being a sincere Christian but who, years later, abandoned the faith for gross sin.

There are very many people in the churches today who think that they are part of the body of Christ but their conversion was flawed. There is no guarantee of salvation for someone who does not fear God. If you do not fear God then you should be very worried indeed and should make your salvation sure (1 Cor 11:31; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 6:4; Heb 4:1, 12:15-17). I have seen supposedly godly people, including many leaders and leader's wives, and even internationally famous preachers, completely fall away from grace.¹⁹ Some even left their families and took up gay relationships, denying that they were ever saved. Being in a

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion of this see my paper on the fear of God.

¹⁹ I am not contradicting the doctrine of perseverance here. Those who fall away (and that is many in the visible church) are merely demonstrating that they were never truly saved at all.

church, or even being a leader, is no guarantee of salvation. One thing is certain, only those who fear God are saved.

If you have no fear of God, you are not only ineffective but also lost. In my view there are many in the modern churches that are both.

Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! *There is no want to those who fear Him.* Ps 34:9

Fear of men

The fear of men is not being terrified of men (though there are some cases of this) but of fearing men more than fearing God. The fear of men includes wanting to please men at the expense of obeying God. This normally has two forms: wanting to please church leaders, and giving in to peer pressure to conform. The power of such fear is extremely strong.

Many church leaders take upon themselves such false authority that they claim to be God's delegated representative above the people. False Charismatic apostles have even stated that God speaks to them and then they speak to the church. This is a denial of the priesthood of all believers. Whilst many conservative leaders would not dare to say this, they act as if it is true nonetheless.

This authoritarianism plagues the church and it leads many church members to live only to please and obey their church leader at all costs. Everything they do is to show their commitment to a man, thinking that this pleases God. In many cases this leads directly to disobeying God.

For example: leaders make demands of gifted, willing men that take up all their spare time and more. They do this ruthlessly by not considering their lack of spare time. The man obeys, thinking that he is putting the kingdom first and that God will then supply his lack. However, he finds himself worn out; he frequently misses out on helping with the children or assisting his wife. As time goes on stress is put upon the family and things start to go wrong. For some, opportunities for overtime are ignored due to the need to go to church meetings of various sorts. This then puts financial pressure on the family as well. Before long, the family is in crisis; all because the man feared disobeying the leader, or appearing faithless. In fact, he was disobeying God by not first catering to the needs of his family.²⁰

This is fairly common in some circles, especially in the UK Restoration churches where 'shepherding doctrine' prevailed. I have heard of families falling apart simply due to the stress placed upon the fathers by so-called apostles and other leaders.

However, there are far worse stresses caused by bad church leaders.

Where a leader espouses wrong doctrine or aberrant practices, commitment to that leader will result in very serious repercussions that will damage a person and his family. It is common to hear of gullible fathers who have given all their money to a church or ministry (sometimes to seek a healing) and the family has ended up destitute whilst the leader has ended up rich. Faithfully giving oneself up to the false doctrine that comes from heretical

²⁰ Contrary to many leader's claims, the Christian priorities are these: God and the kingdom first; family responsibilities next (family is also part of God's kingdom); then church, then other things like neighbours, work, friends, outsiders etc. Family responsibilities come before church duties. 'If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever,' 1 Tim 5:8. Failing to provide for the family's needs are denying the faith.

preachers also brings a world of pain. Equally, submitting to the false practices established by leaders, instead of testing them by God's word, leads to devilish consequences.

Then we have the problem of peer pressure.

When you are in a crowd of hundreds, or even thousands, of people who all follow a certain wrong course, it is extremely difficult to stand one's ground and be the only person different – but that is necessary if we are to follow God. This is one of the evils that arise from large churches; the peer pressure forces conformity which most people are not built to withstand.

Thus, for instance, Charismatic churches in this country were filled with lemming-like believers who went headstrong into the evils of the Toronto Blessing.²¹ If they were in a small house meeting and crazy behaviour erupted, they would have left immediately. However, when you are in a large crowd of people you respect who are all behaving crazy, it is more difficult to run away.

However, peer pressure does not need crowds; it can arise from just one or two people. An example:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. Gal 2:11-13

Here is the power of peer pressure. Peter and Barnabas had stood up for the freedom of Gentile Christians to live without the law of Moses, This included being able to fellowship directly with all people; thus Jewish and Gentile Christians ate together freely, contrary to strict application of the law. [This regarded the special laws about meats and drinks, contrary to the food of the Gentiles.]²² When Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came to Gentile Antioch, Peter and Barnabas stopped eating with Gentile believers out of peer pressure fear. This led to Paul's just condemnation. In Peter's case, his behaviour was directly contrary to the heavenly vision given him in Acts 10:10-20.

All in all, fearing men and submitting to them in the place of God leads to extremely serious problems that can devastate a family for life. Needless to say, the outcome of this is complete ineffectiveness towards God.

Do not fear them. Matt 10:26

²¹ Yes, I say this unequivocally; The Toronto Blessing was a demonic deception in the church which was evil and which had very many bad fruits. Anything which leads a person to lose self-control is fleshly and sinful; the TB was the very essence of a lack of self-control resulting from mystical passivity. The fruits of the TB are commonly seen in historic cults, sects, the occult, false religions, and bouts of hysterical delusions and religious hysteria. There is nothing godly or spiritual in this; it is common occultic phenomena. The fruits were devastating: families split, churches split, a bad testimony ensued, injuries (commonly, people falling over broke bones or hit heads) and much sin. Just one example; someone I used to know is a famous songwriter / church leader and worship leader. During the height of the TB he pogoed (bounced on the spot up and down) for a long time shouting, 'I'm a piece of toast for the Lord'. This is extremely stupid, sinful and gullible behaviour that made the devil laugh.

²² Moses: 'You shall not eat any fat, of ox or sheep or goat ... you shall by no means eat it.' (Lev 7:23-24). Christ: 'For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.' (1 Tim 4:4-5).

Ecumenism

Evangelicals used to think that the problem of ecumenism was a dead duck. There was a time in the 60s and 70s when the move to international ecumenism was a threat; indeed many good people got sucked into joining compromised missions and conferences. Then the situation became clearer and evangelicals tended to stay away from ecumenical moves that embraced large institutional bodies (such as the Anglicans). However, ecumenism is now subtler and more rampant than ever.

The character of those calling themselves 'Christian' is more varied than at almost any other time. Supposed Christian churches can embrace a wide range of doctrines and practices and yet call themselves 'Christian' or 'evangelical'.

In this hotbed of errors, a large number of national and regional ecumenical groups have recently emerged. Just in the Sussex area alone there are probably 20 variations of ecumenical groups, with five or six being the most prominent.

Conservative churches are being put under more and more pressure (usually by some idealistic young pastor) to pursue numerical growth and hopes are raised that partnership with some ecumenical group will give them a wider exposure. This is a great mistake.

Firstly, there is no superior body to the local church; no better idea for growth than the local church. The local church is a self-governing, self-strategising, self-regulating body under elders responsible to God. To get involved in some superior body implies there is something better than God above elders. The idea is actually a blasphemy suggesting that men have a better idea for strategy than God.

Secondly there is no precedent for this in Scripture. You do not see the Ephesian church feel that it needs to partner with the Galatian churches in order to grow. The rebukes of the local churches in Revelation do not include admonition for failing to join with other churches in common events. Neither is there any apostolic command for churches to join together in national or regional bodies.

Thirdly, regional bodies necessarily involve regional leadership, which is above that of elders in the local church. This is anathema. What usually happens is that the senior pastor (an unbiblical post), joins the leadership of a regional board, which then makes decisions for all the churches in the group (this may be played down as being minor decisions, but if they affect the body then they are far from minor). The pastor's pride is elevated by being in this post (itself dangerous) but the role of the other elders is negated. Even if decisions for the local church regarding ecumenical strategies are prior discussed in the eldership, it is still wrong.

What about the synod of Jerusalem in Acts 15? Firstly, this was a one-off body, convened under apostolic authority (not available now) in order to debate a serious theological problem that had arisen. It was not an ecumenical group that acted above all the churches included in it, but something called to deal with a single matter. We do not see another one in Acts. Furthermore, this synod fully involved all the people, who had authority in making a consensus decision, which was only ratified by the elders and apostles under the chairmanship of James. It was not a superior body whose processes were hidden from the people; it was simply a gathering of all in order to thrash out a problem.

Fourthly, we are not to fellowship with those who hold heretical doctrines or behave in indecent ways. By joining some of the modern groups you commit sin. Characteristics of

some of these regional bodies (through the various member churches involved) include: Erastianism, Arminianism, Sacerdotalism, Sacramentalism, denial of the real Gospel, Pelagianism, women leadership, toleration of gay ethics, false sanctification, denial of justification by faith, Charismania (radical and moderate), singing songs that should not be sung, mysticism, Dominionism and Antinomianism. These are simply the first ones I could think of that I have seen in such groups.

So, in a general way there is an international move (largely through the compromises of the Charismatic church) for Protestants to unite with Roman Catholics. This has been spearheaded by some famous names. This is one problem that should not be minimised. The second is the large number of national and regional ecumenical groups that plan to bring many churches in partnership for set goals (evangelism, training etc.); these are a second problem, that is probably more dangerous in practice.

Paul's warning is clear, 'bad company ruins good morals';²³ ecumenism is wrong.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 1 Cor 5:6

He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. Prov 13:20

Just plain sin

Now I am not one to be able to preach to others about their sin because I am a great sinner too. We all sin because we have an active old man to fight. However, notwithstanding my own sin (over which I grieve), I must talk about the problem of sin in the churches because it is so rampant today.

The problem is not that we all sin, but how we view this sin.

When I sin, I sin as a rebel. I sin because I choose to, having submitted (foolishly) to some temptation in a moment of weakness. I trust this obvious sin is not continual (though we all sin all the time in many ways, not least by sins of omission) and I mourn this sin, confessing it to God, with no holding back about my stupidity. I then seek to live repentantly, asking God to help me not commit this sin again (by strengthening my resolve to put on the new man). This is normal and an emphasis on confession used to be commonplace. Not now!

There has been a recent surge in false teaching about grace that has become nigh on universal. There has always been an antinomian edge to common teachings found in Pietism, Quietism, Wesleyan Perfectionism, the Holiness Movement, Higher life, Pentecostalism and Charismaticism, but this has now increased in focus. Certain famous Charismatics emphasise antinomian teachings on grace, even to the point of suggesting that we should never, ever consider ourselves guilty of sin.²⁴ This is heresy of the first order.

Paul clearly did not believe in this antinomian doctrine when he charged certain associates with sin, some of which he even delivered to Satan. Neither did he stop instructing

²³ 1 Cor 15:33, RSV; 'Evil company corrupts good habits,' in NKJV.

²⁴ For example, 'In Christ God holds us guilty for absolutely nothing. Some people won't accept forgiveness, setting themselves above God.' Terry Virgo, Twitter, 6.9.11. This is not out of context; Virgo has preached whole messages on similar lines. He misunderstands grace, the cross and the discipline of God through being confused by Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic and Higher Life writers.

disciples about the dangers of deception and falling into the snare of the devil (which always involves sin). In fact, so severe was he that he told the Galatians that he feared that they had been bewitched and had followed another Gospel. These are people he led to Christ and probably baptised (or supervised their baptism) and appointed their elders.

So while modern leaders can say, '*You are never guilty*', Paul could say the following to acts of sin in Christians:

The sin of incest

Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor 5:5

The sin of greed

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Tim 6:9

The sin of blasphemy

Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1 Tim 1:20

The sin of giving up

Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. Acts 15:38-40²⁵

The sin of arguing, denying Christian unity

I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names *are* in the Book of Life. Phil 4:2-3

The sin of perverting the Gospel

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. Gal 1:6-9²⁶

The sin of legalism

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before *them* all, 'If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?' Gal 2:11-14

²⁵ Note that Paul was commended by the brethren and so could not have been guilty of wrong-doing here. Some writers contend for Barnabas in this strife but this is wrong. Barnabas ceases to be mentioned from this point in church history while Paul went on to greater and greater exploits. Barnabas' sin was in giving prior loyalty to his cousin over the work (Col 4:10).

²⁶ Arminianism and Amyraldism are perversions of the Gospel that affect huge numbers of modern Christians.

We could add more quotes but the point is made. According to Paul, Peter, ‘was to be blamed’; that is, Peter had committed public sin and needed public rebuke because he was guilty. If modern supposed apostles were teaching the Corinthians, they would have consented to a man committing incest with his stepmother. This is the ridiculous level of modern antinomianism.

It is for this reason that elders are accounted under stricter sanctions:

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear. 1 Tim 5:19-20

An elder caught in sin is not considered to be ‘not guilty’ because he is in grace, but guilty of sin that needs a public rebuke. All sin in leaders requires public rebuke, not just public sins, because they are more accountable.

Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. Jm 3:1

It is noteworthy that modern church leaders are never reprimanded, let alone rebuked publicly, despite certain sins being public knowledge, let alone the many sins of deception and false teaching.²⁷ For instance, endorsing the Toronto Blessing is a sin, pure and simple, since this was a massive surge of demonic deception on the church leading to many acts of sin. Endorsing Todd Bentley (who is a false prophet, guilty of awful public sins) is a sin, yet many have done this with no apology or repentance. Most of the modern Charismatic leaders signed a document endorsing the Kansas City Prophets as genuine prophets in the late 1990s, I have never seen any of them repent this clear sin and misleading of the church.²⁸

So, we have a situation in the modern church where leaders are guilty of many public sins but are rarely disciplined. But this acceptance of sin, coupled with the antinomian teachings on grace, leads members to have a low view of sin themselves. In all perfectionist systems this is the case.

So, it is common to see young people in modern churches, especially Charismatic churches, committing sins in a public and casual manner, with no sense of guilt or shame.

I have heard leaders of young people groups boast about cheating the taxman, or pouring cola over the seat in front of them at the cinema to prevent someone sitting in front of them. And this is the thin end of the wedge.

I heard one young man, who considered himself a teacher, explain that he frequented prostitutes because he was lonely; and said this with no shame at all. I have seen men slander other brothers on a regular basis with hardly a care (yet in the OT this was a capital offence). Lying is commonplace and gossip seems to be a church preoccupation. I have seen good men ruined because they preached the true Gospel, and others badly damaged by slander. I have heard (first-hand) of elders and deacons taking money from churches by

²⁷ It is remarkable that many widely-known Charismatic leaders in the last forty years have fallen into gross, public sin. Yet, on most occasions, there was a conspiracy to hide this fact from as many people as possible. However, Scripture tells us that the sin of leaders must receive a public rebuke so that all may fear. The list of Charismatic leaders who have committed adultery, consorted with prostitutes or fallen into homosexuality is quite large and includes many famous names.

²⁸ Apart from the clear erroneous teachings and the aberrations they perpetrated (which eventually coalesced in the Toronto Blessing, several of them were found guilty of specific sins, such as sexual abuse, occult involvement, alcoholism and homosexuality. Many Charismatic leaders let these men teach their churches whilst such men were committing serious sins. The Lakeland Revival of Todd Bentley, lauded by millions, occurred whilst he was committing adultery, let alone his boasting of kicking an old lady in the face to rid her of a demon. Terry Virgo is just one leader who endorsed him at the time and I have never seen any rescinding of this. I also know that his people are still enamoured of Bentley.

fraud, and many in leadership are known to be Freemasons. I have known supposed apostles deceive whole churches with fraud, while many in radical Charismatic churches regularly commit blasphemy. Supposed Charismatic leaders have been exposed using ear-pieces, wi-fi to prompters, pretending to have 'words of knowledge' (prescience). Many Charismatic leaders have been caught performing sexual and psychological abuse.

We could go on and on; the list is endless. Sin is rampant in the supposed Christian church and this has made it ineffective at every level.

The real problem is knowing what sin is and how to deal with it. This is basic education that most Christians have not received. False teaching on grace leads to: a) not calling sin, 'sin'; and b) not using the guilt to grieve over the sin when confessing it to God. I believe that a failure to teach the Biblical doctrine of sin is one of the greatest problems in the modern church.

Sin must be mourned and it is only mourners who are comforted in the kingdom (Matt 5:4). Treating sins casually means that one has no conception of righteousness and can never be effective in the Christian life.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Heb 12:1

Faithlessness

This is a type of sin that has become so widespread that some think of it as a virtue. The believer is called to be faithful to everyone and in everything. He is to be faithful to God first; then to his wife and family, his parents, other believers, his employer, his neighbours, and so on.

Faithlessness is breaking faith with any of these people and this is expressed in a variety of ways.

First let us just list some examples of faithlessness:

- Dishonouring God: such as by ignoring him, failing to give thanks, failing to study his word, failing to pray daily, failing to submit to his sovereignty (complaining) and so on.
- Dishonouring parents: ignoring their needs, avoiding them, failing to communicate or fellowship.
- Cheating on employers: stealing petty things, cheating on time, not working hard enough, wasting telephone calls etc.
- Slandering fellow believers, lying, promoting gossip, bearing false witness etc.
- Failing to help your neighbour when you were able.
- Failing to give to the poor in your sphere of influence.

We cannot give an exposition of all these examples in this short paper; but I will look at two.

Bearing false witness

It cannot be stressed enough that this is a very serious, and potentially terminal, sin. That God takes a dim view of this is evidenced in the Mosaic Law, where offenders could be killed (Deut 19:16-21). Bearing false witness against another believer is even worse because it seeks to break down the body of Christ. Attacking a brother on false pretences is attacking God, his master (Rm 14:4).

Now first we have to add a caveat. The Bible makes it clear that we must contend for the faith in confronting false teachers, false doctrines and wolves in the church. The flock cannot be protected from wolves unless they are exposed as such. This means naming names of false teachers, false teachings, and exposing heretics. This is proper pastoral behaviour. But this is not false witness, rather it is a true witness (if done properly). Clear facts must be brought to bear against the false teacher and not hearsay. Correctly applied this is safe and a good work.

Bearing false witness is exceptionally dangerous; indeed it is often equated with murder, adultery and stealing (Lk 18:20; Rm 13:9). God hates those who practice this and stands as a Judge upon them:

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! Jm 5:9

These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, seven *are* an abomination to Him ... A false witness *who* speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. Prov 6:16-19

A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape. ... A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish. Prov 19:5, 9

Despite this, the modern church is filled with vilification of the brethren. Just look at the 'Christian' web sites attacking all and sundry to see what I mean. So-called Christian ministries (many from Jewish Root stables) are filled with bilious attacks on good men, with strings of invective based upon flimsy or non-existent evidence. Often it is just some pet wrong doctrine that has been attacked. Indeed, I have often heard it expressed (by pastors) that the worst attackers of good teachers are from the church and not the world. The most difficult thing for a teacher to suffer is the lies and slanders of those he is striving to teach because some nerve has been touched.

This was a common form of attack against the Lord Jesus himself, and he warned us that similar rejection and lies would be used against those who most closely followed him. The more one strives to teach the truth in a black and white fashion, centring upon Christ, the more one will be attacked by those in the church with axes to grind. It sounds shocking, but it is a fact I have learned from experiences (both my own and many leaders I know).

Now the outcome of this can be extremely dangerous to those who do not repent. I once knew a young man slander a teacher that he had followed for many years, but had recently rejected an admonishment. The sin escalated and the teacher withdrew from the sinning brother after giving him several warnings. The sinner responded by travelling around slandering the teacher to everyone that the person knew of, telling many lies. The result was that some of the teacher's friends (including long term friends) separated from him without giving reasons (a sin in itself, but that is another matter). The sinning brother was warned that this offence was exceptionally serious and that God would not ignore it. He refused to repent. Within a year he was dead.

This is not the first time that I have heard of such awful things.

God is not mocked. He is a Judge to false witnesses and will take action as he sees fit. If false witnesses are not really believers, then hell awaits them. If they are foolish Christians, then they may be saved (if they were truly justified) but will get to heaven as if through fire, losing all their rewards (1 Cor 3:15).

Needless to say, a false witness cannot be effective in Christian ministry.

Failing to keep faith with the master

1] And the Lord said, 'Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season? Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. But if that servant says in his heart, "My master is delaying his coming," and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the unbelievers.

2] And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

3] But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.' Lk 12:42-48

Let us first clear something up that confuses many commentators; this is not talking about unbelievers in general but stewards of the Master who are called to faithful service. The context is the instruction of the disciples (verse 41) and especially that believers would be ready and faithful at the return of the Lord in glory (verse 40). This is church people, although the first section concerns superficial leaders who do not really know the Lord.

The warning to false leaders is truly staggering, 'the master of that servant will ... cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers'. Such is the fate of those who lead churches and denominations in the name of Jesus but fleece and abuse the flock. There are very many of these around today, some of them followed by millions of gullible Christians. False prophet Todd Bentley is just one example. Indeed, I find it hard to conceive that any American televangelist, demanding money for favours, can be a Christian at all. Though they are rich in this world they will suffer eternally.

So the first section is about those who knew God's will, who read the Bible and teach it, but use their leadership to abuse believers and get rich. They know what they are doing and sin deliberately, loving this world.

However, the second section concerns true believers who know God's will but do not bother to do it, or disobey it. Their chastisement is severe but very different from the first section. They are not accounted with the unbelievers but are beaten (disciplined).

The third section refers to people who fail to study God's word at all and just do not know how to live. These will also be beaten but with fewer stripes.

Needless to say those in the latter two sections will lose their rewards as part of their discipline by their heavenly Father. The chastisement is at the wisdom of God; sometimes it is inflicted in this life, at least partly, but sometimes a person is allowed to run free only to suffer severe loss at the final judgment.

Christians should consider a similar passage in Matthew 18, which ends with these words:
And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. Matt 18:34-35

Again the context is believers and the kingdom of heaven (verse 23). In any case the final words of the Lord settle the matter, 'So My heavenly Father also will do to you.'

Though the language is figurative (symbolic), nevertheless we are talking about very serious discipline here. Though this is not talking directly about stewardship, it is still relevant as it is explaining the need for good relationships and righteousness within the kingdom.

So what do we learn from this?

At the very least we learn that faithfulness in the service of God is judged. This endorses plain apostolic teaching elsewhere (1 Cor 3:10-15). Then we learn that there are variations in the judgment passed according to the sin and level of faithlessness. In the worst case this regards unbelievers who have got into the position of church leaders and abuse the flock to their advantage. This is very common today in radical Charismania and historic Pentecostalism.²⁹ Such will be exposed and go to hell. Then there are those who sinned against their knowledge of God's law, or just plain ignored that knowledge, who will suffer worse than those who just did not know the law, which is itself a sin in that it ignores their heavenly Father's instruction. Furthermore, in divine service, relationships in the body must be righteous, or there will be additional chastisement.

It is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1 Cor 4:2

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. Rev 2:10

The failure to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit

Charismatics make a great fuss about the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, which are not highlighted in Scripture, and then twist them to mean occult things. For instance, the Word of Knowledge is nowhere stated to be prescience in Scripture. In fact, it is referring to the gift of didactic instruction to edify believers; a gift required by elders. Those with the Word of Knowledge teach people; they do not see men's hidden thoughts in order to engender a healing or life command.³⁰

Knowledge comes from God and his ministers impart knowledge through teaching in order to strengthen God's people:

The LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth *come* knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. Prov 2:6-7

The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. Isa 11:2

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak a word in season to *him who is* weary. Isa 50:4

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. Dan 2:21

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Eph 1:17

²⁹ In fact, radical Charismatics are merely aping the worst excesses of historic Pentecostalism, such as Latter Rain and Azusa Street. As an example of a Pentecostal leader (respected by Charismatics) in this position take William Branham (founder of the 50s healing movement). He denied the Trinity (he was a modalist), denied hell as eternal punishment, equated the Bible with astrology, blamed women for evil (saying that women are not worth, 'a good clean bullet!'), used clairvoyancy, relied upon a demon, was accused of fraud by colleagues, and claimed he was the angel of Rev 3:14 and 10:7. See my paper: *Rescue Package: Historical Background To Charismatic Theology & Practice* for more concise information on Pentecostal history or *The Origins of Pentecostalism* for detailed information.

³⁰ This version of the Word of Knowledge was developed by Pentecostals, coming to a head with William Branham, whose words were (according to previous colleagues) either demonic or fraud.

The Charismatic Word of Knowledge (when it is not fraudulent using wireless receivers) strives to be like the use of prescience by witchdoctors and shamans. Knowing the thoughts of another is the Holy Grail of magical power. Leaders who manifest this are thought to be especially powerful. When it is genuinely found, it is merely the effect of a demon reading the thoughts, or knowing the historical background, of a person and passing it on to a leader who is allied to the devil. The same happens in genuine clairvoyancy, except that the demon pretends to be a dead person. We are never commanded to strive to know the thoughts of another in order to have power over them.

Those occasions where Jesus manifests prescience are never called a 'word of knowledge', but, 'he knew their thoughts' (Matt 9:4, 12:25; Lk 6:8). This was part of the ministry of the Son of God that is not available to mere mortals. In the same way believers should not expect to: walk on water, be transfigured, calm a storm, feed five thousand or pass through a violent crowd unharmed etc. The apostles sometimes came close to knowing a person's thoughts, but this was enlightenment by the Spirit specifically for that occasion to protect the church (e.g. Acts 8:20-23). In fact the majority of occasions where Jesus used this power it were also in the context of opposition.

If the gifts that Charismatics highlight were so vital, there would be apostolic instruction at length upon them. Apart from an exhortation about tongues in Corinth (which was to curb this temporary gift not increase it) there is very little said. Prophecy is spoken of, but not in the way that Charismatics claim to use it (see footnote). The apostles give no set instructions on how to conduct a healing or a resurrection, but they write page after page on character.

Fruit is frequently commanded by God's word; indeed, fruit is specifically demanded in order to verify that a disciple is a genuine Christian. If there is no fruit then there is no root.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season. Ps 1:3

Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing. Ps 92:13-14

The ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience. Lk 8:15

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Jn 15:2

He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. Jn 15:5

But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness. Rm 6:22

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another -- to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. Rm 7:4

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Gal 5:22-24

The fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and truth. Eph 5:9

Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Phil 1:11

Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Col 1:10

Surely we do not need to list further texts?

The fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of righteousness, fruit to God are demanded from cover to cover in Scripture and fruit is far more important than supernatural gifts. Indeed, since prophecy has now changed and since tongues have gone (being only as a sign during the apostolic age) any supernatural gift is exceedingly rare (I will not say impossible, it is God's gifting as he sees fit). I have yet to see a genuine miracle of healing proved to be real via a Charismatic ministry (but I have experienced other healings). Most of the stories are apocryphal, fraud, or fail to stand up to scrutiny. Many so called healings later led to death shortly afterwards. Charismatic conventions stimulate adrenaline and endorphins, which make people feel great, often carrying an analgesic effect – but this is not healing. By the way, if anyone really had raised the dead it would be front-page news in every global newspaper.³¹

The focus is in the wrong place. The emphasis of Scriptural instruction is on bearing fruit for God in our daily walk and not on gaining supernatural power to look impressive or to gain credentials for world leadership platforms. Jesus even said that seeking signs was evil (Matt 12:39; Lk 11:29); it is evil because it is superficial and puffs up the pride of the person doing them.³²

The real problem of modern Charismatics is the failure to pursue character and instead seek after signs and wonders. This is childish. At essence it is a striving after mere externalism and materialism instead of spiritual stature. Healings are outward and flashy; but spiritual power lies in enduring character values that are in Christ.

People who focus on the external instead of spiritual fruit will be ineffective.

I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain. Jn 15:16

The focus upon getting power instead of accepting weakness

We don't need power, we need grace. Power can come from various sources but grace only comes from the cross of Christ. Grace has its origin in the heart of God for his people, expressed in the sacrifice of his own beloved Son. Grace gives us all that we need to be a covenant people because it gives us what is in Christ. Anything that is not in Christ is not worth having.

Now why do I say that power can come from various sources? The answer is because the statement is true. Power is the ability to change something as a result of exerting energy of some kind. The problem is where this energy comes from.

A great deal that passes for power in the church actually arises from the power of the flesh. This is the working of man with no submission to God.³³ If you look around the church

³¹ Todd Bentley (and others) have claimed to raise dozens of people; but no hard evidence is ever presented.

³² We cannot get into the apologetics of Charismatics regarding signs here. For more information see my papers: *Charismatic Catastrophe, Baptism in the Spirit, Why Tongues are not Available Today*.

³³ The flesh begins when the old nature is allowed to dominate the soul; at that point the soul becomes flesh and sin results.

today, a huge amount is the flesh in action, from conservative churches to radical Charismatics.

When conservative churches build everything in church life upon the powers of a man; when sermons, based upon an intellectual's gifts, dominate services; when every decision is made by one man; when church members are not allowed to contribute their gifts in any way; all this points to a work of the flesh.

Much of modern worship is fleshly. In formal, institutional churches, where worship is in a large cathedral type building, with ranks of choirs, coloured light from stained-glass windows, and an organ bellowing out emotional cadences; there we have the flesh being psychologically stimulated. The feelings of 'godliness' or 'spirituality' are produced by mechanical objects and a rigged atmosphere.

Charismatic churches are much worse. In these the emotionalism is deliberately stimulated as if in a TV entertainment show or a rock concert. In fact some TV 'mentalist' entertainers can reproduce everything in Charismatic churches, including the healings and swooning. The worship band is flesh. The worship leader leads in a fleshly manner (neither the band nor the worship leader has any apostolic basis). The preacher preaches in an authoritarian fleshly manner. The atmosphere is deliberately rigged, from soft, quiet meditation to loud praise (and the reverse), to build up emotional passivity in the people to make them easy to manipulate. All this is fleshly stimulation. The result is corporate gibberish (tongues that have no meaning and are not ever interpreted, either sung or spoken in unison – completely unscriptural),³⁴ followed by mystical swoons and a host of other demonic phenomena.

We could continue listing aspects of the flesh, but the principle is clearly understood. Power can come from the flesh.

But power also comes from demonic sources.

There are many false religions and cults, which demonstrate power. Indeed, many false religions can boast of individuals who have demonstrated Biblical miracles far more than Christian mystics can (I have even heard of a guru that once walked on water). We see this in Exodus where Pharaoh's magicians could mimic many miracles conducted by Moses (not all). In other places we also see that divination was conducted accurately by magicians and priests. Saul would not have gone to the medium / witch at En Dor if she had no power (1 Sam 28:7). In fact the very reason Saul went was because she had a familiar spirit at her beck and call.

Because of this acceptance of the 'spiritual' (i.e. occult) realm (a sin) that predominates eastern religion, John Wimber called upon the church to emulate this predisposition and learn from eastern religions (the 'new paradigm'). This is like asking a righteous man to go and learn from a murderer just because he is good at making money. Thus Wimber endorsed mystical and occult practices, and doctrines of the foulest sort, and this was merged into the Signs and Wonders movement, and its spin-offs. Wimber brought a western intellectual, academic approach to an old heretical trend, making it more

³⁴ Biblical tongues were human languages spoken by someone who had not learned them. This was why it was a noteworthy miracle used to authenticate the early church in its proclamation of the Gospel. They were always praising the works of God and never addressed to someone other than God. In church meetings (they were not widespread and died out within a few decades at most) they had to be interpreted by someone because nothing insensible was allowed in the church meeting.

acceptable to rational people.³⁵ All that happened was the syncretism of Christianity and the occult. This platform led to the direct introduction of occultism into the church at the same time as occultism was being infiltrated into other Charismatic churches by the Word Faith Movement, but by a different route.³⁶

Whether it comes from the Mind Sciences or from eastern religions, the occult is demonic; plain and simple. We have nothing to learn from it – but it does have power. Thus when later exotic phenomena began to appear in churches that had gone down this route, we found expressions that had been seen in false religions for thousands of years. The Toronto Blessing, for example, was nothing but a recrudescence of Kundalini yoga common in extreme Hindu practices or radical Chinese Qigong and occult prophets in history.³⁷

We could also look at the power of Mesmerism, later defined as hypnotism. Again this rose from occult practices brought into the west by Anton Mesmer. Mesmerism was then adapted into all sorts of psychological and religious groups who thought it was an innocent technique. Some church leaders used the power of hypnotism deliberately and openly, but many churches used it without realising that they were doing it. Whenever you get people into a state of passivity through Charismatic worship you make them suggestible to hypnotic commands. When a powerful leader addresses people in this state (eyes closed, swaying, hardly conscious) the effect is like a hypnotic command. Secular professional hypnotists have witnessed various Charismatic meetings and have commented that this is pure hypnotism which they can reproduce (and have).

All this is the power of the flesh.

There are many 'Christian' works around today that have been developed as a result of large amounts of money. The ministry is like a big corporate machine in action. It progresses through large conventions and conferences and is centred in big churches housed in big purpose-built buildings. Usually there is a very professional TV ministry and Internet publication system. To keep it going requires constant demands for money and gullible saints cheerfully hand it over. This is the flesh.

We could continue but must stop somewhere; the flesh is everywhere in church life. It is powerful, but it is not godly.

The problem with Christians is that they keep seeking power for its own sake instead of seeking Christ. They say they follow Christ, but their heart is openly set on getting power from somewhere so that they can do the things they hear others are doing. When a leader hears that a man can knock down hundreds of people by waving his hand or blowing on them (an occult technique) he seeks the power to do this also, thinking that he will honour God in some way. This is a fallacy and it is pure sin. This desire is fleshly.

All seeking for fleshly power in ministry is sinful. Why do you need power at all? If we seek to honour God, follow Christ and walk in the Spirit, we will be given all the power we need, and this will come from grace as we need it.

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Heb 4:16

³⁵ Seen previously in the Quakers and worse in the Shakers; then in Unity, New Thought, Christian Science etc..

³⁶ This was through Hagin and Kenyon, taking the lead from Unity, New Thought, PP Quimby, and Mesmer.

³⁷ Such as the Camisards.

This is important. Grace is only ever given when we actually need it. If we are not in need then we do not require grace at that time. Grace also comes to those in prayer; it comes to those who express their need to God. It comes to those in need of mercy because they are weak and sinful. Those who know their weakness get grace. Those who excel in gifts and do not approach God in humility get no grace.

Paul was dominated by a sense of his weakness. He constantly faced problems with people who did not accept his apostleship because he was not one of the twelve; thus we see his occasional defence of his ministry and his introductory statements in his letters claiming apostleship. But this was difficult for Paul.

Paul also had physical problems that led to weakness in his body and even issues that made his appearance unpleasant (Gal 4:13-15).

On top of this he was constantly persecuted, much more than any other apostle. This was because he travelled so far and met with opposition from all quarters. His list of sufferings in 2 Corinthians is shocking. Thus it should not surprise us that he sometimes felt as if he was dying and knew despair (2 Cor 1:8-9).

All of this sounds very different from modern apostles, prophets and preachers who live a life of ease and riches.

So, Paul, quite reasonably, went to God to ask him to heal him of a particular problem, Surely Paul had enough to deal with. However, God told him that this additional suffering was very necessary for him and that God's strength in his life was only made perfect (matured) in weakness.

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:7-10

Thus Paul learned to take pleasure in 'in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake'. Paul's problems were necessary for his powerful ministry. He did not seek power for its own sake but sought Christ and accepted his afflictions. This is the opposite of what is being taught in many pulpits.

Those who are strong in the word of God and in the discernment of the Spirit have a long back history. Very often it is very different from the caricature you would expect of modern leaders. The true worker for God is afflicted in many ways. He is usually sick in some manner, or has many ailments. He is the butt of slander and insult. People reject him as the rejected his master. Often his own family and friends have deserted him; he is no stranger to treachery. He is usually modest in possessions and never rich.

Despite all these negative things he is a generous person who is loved by those who get close to him. His true friends are amazed that he could have been slandered and betrayed. Despite his suffering, he continues, as best he can, without complaint to God for his lot in life. Indeed, he will always be a champion of God's sovereignty in all things.

Thus we can look into church history and see that the really great men were very much like this. It is certainly true of both John Calvin and Martin Luther, but of many other great

men also. They were not perfect (no man is) and made some mistakes, but in general they were humble men whose reliance on God alone led to grace and power in ministry to glorify Christ. These were effective men.

All who would be effective need to be aware of their great need, their sinfulness, their weakness and their need of grace. They celebrate their afflictions under God's sovereignty and seek mercy at the throne of grace. The more they are weak, the stronger they get. Such are effective Christians.

We also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. 2 Cor 13:4

For we are glad when we are weak. 2 Cor 13:9

Conclusion

I make it my prayer (knowing my own weaknesses and sin) that I will be faithful to my God. I need to pray for that because I am weak; if God does not help me I will fail, so I ask for help not to fail. I want to hear God say to me on the Day of Judgment, 'Well done good and faithful servant'. Anything less than that is pointless and futile. Only such desires can prove fruitful and effective.

Because I am frail and weak, I cannot make safe decisions on any subsidiary matters. So I seek God's help daily to do whatever he tells me at that specific time. If I daily do what God says, and amend my course accordingly, I am more likely to be faithful to the end. The key is dependence upon God for everything, in seeking to glorify Christ in everything.

Now the mistake that people make is to come to some goal they think glorifies God and submit everything to that. Often this is a long-term objective that drives lifetime ambitions. But if that goal is wrong, or compromised, a person's entire life can be ruined and unfruitful. I have read of famous people who came to the conclusion, at the end of their lives, that their whole life's work had been wrong.

Let me give you some examples.

A Charismatic 'apostle' has a passion for building the biggest church in the city that he can. This is a part of his strategy to control hundreds of churches that have the same goal in their locations. He sets about achieving this through various methods and builds some large churches. He thinks that a big 'presence' in the town will convince sinners that God is relevant to them and that the church will influence the world. He is sincere in wanting to glorify God. He is sincere in wanting to spread the Gospel. He is wrong on just about everything else. Being passionate for his vision he has lost sight of the need to be obedient to Biblical commands regarding church, leadership, ministry, worship, pastoring, disciplining and love. He followed the examples of other 'successful' Charismatic men worldwide in implementing strategy instead of kneeling before God's word. Virtually everything in his churches is wrong. At the end of his life God will weigh his ministry in the balances and it will count as little because it was unbiblical, based upon the world, established on the Old Covenant, fed the flesh, and did not glorify Christ but rather glorified men. This man had everything in the world: authority, prestige, fame, money, the regard of his congregations and so on; but everything he did in his ministry was ineffective because it was not dependent upon God's word.

A poor, young, widow in a Third World country had virtually nothing. She struggled to bring up her children to honour God and worship Christ, even though they had no money

to buy a Bible, or even shoes. All her life she continued to do good to her neighbours in need, even though she herself was worthy of aid. She continued to influence her children to love God and do good to men. She had none of the supposedly necessary artefacts of western life: a TV, telephone, computer, car or even a radio. In fact, she did not even have a cooker but cooked on a pot over a wood fire. She shared all she had and thanked God that she could. I tell you that on the Day of Judgment, this woman will be made a prince over ten cities, while the apostle cleans her threshold.

Brethren, to be effective we must devote ourselves entirely to God and we do this by honouring and obeying his word. We can never be effective in the slightest if we ignore God word. Thus we must make it a pre-occupation to study the Bible and ensure that we are applying it to every area of our lives, constantly.

Coupled with this must be a commitment to a complete dependence upon God; not a partial dependence, but a total dependence. The moment we feel that we are equipped and able to do something without dependence upon God, we will perform a work of the flesh.

Brethren, let us determine to honour God and avoid a life that is ineffective.

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