

## REVIVAL NEWS

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**DECEMBER 2018 \*\*\*\* DECEMBER 2018 \*\*\*\* DECEMBER 2018**

# THE CHURCH IN ACTION

## **Stop going to church, and start being the church**

I have been thinking much about the church, the Ecclesia, and the clear pattern that is presented in the Scriptures. The challenge that faces us is how do we adopt, adapt and change to become the church that is spoken of in the Scripture. Many years ago, I received a revelation that we are to “**stop going to church, and start being the church**”. Most of us have grown up with the idea that church is where we go on Sundays, to some dedicated structure to ‘worship God’ in ways that include singing, prayers and some spoken delivery of the word. Some churches will have the Lord’s Table, and many do not. That is church! And we have ‘been to church’; we have fulfilled our duty.

We have all assumed that there is a congregation that sits obediently in pews or chairs; that there is an ordained clergy, whether he or she be called priest or pastor. This ordained one is essential for the proper conduct of ‘church’ and there is no expectation that the members of the congregation have anything to contribute or can participate in any meaningful way.

## **Becoming the church of the Scripture**

As more and more are moving into an apostolic and prophetic understanding of the Ecclesia, the challenge looms ever larger: how do we become the church of the Scripture and what does it mean to be apostolic and prophetic, not only in doctrine, but also in practice. How does the apostolic/prophetic revelation alter our practice of church? Or is it simply adding new wine to an old wine skin? Jesus told us, that will never work.

In my Christian lifetime we have witnessed the Charismatic movement and so many churches simply tried to add this new wine to old wine skins. Of course, the old wine skins leaked and after a few years there is no sign of the new wine. The same will happen in general with the apostolic/prophetic wine, if we simply try to add it to what already exists.

## **Transformational change**

The word of God requires transformational change, and this is the challenge we are faced with right now. God has given us revelation and understanding and there are many very good preachers, apostles and teachers bringing forth the apostolic and prophetic revelation. But there is little change in the practice of the church.

## **THE OLD TESTAMENT PATTERN**

When we look at the Old Testament, we see that God gave His people a full prescription of how to live according to His word and how to relate to God who had presenced Himself in

the midst of His people. It is very helpful to look at the resultant lifestyle of people living in obedience to the law [the Torah, the teaching of Moses].

- God required **daily offerings**;
- God required **Sabbath keeping**;
- God required **monthly acknowledgement of the new moon**;
- and God required the **observance of the annual feasts**.

When we look at this more closely, we find a wonderful pattern on which to base our lifestyle and practice of worshiping God.

As New Testament believers we can live and abide in the fulfillment of the Torah that came in and through Jesus Christ. We can adopt and practice a daily lifestyle, weekly fulfillment of the Sabbath, monthly gatherings that the new moon pointed to, and the annual feasts where the whole nation gathers to worship God and to hear His word.

## **Fulfilling the pattern today**

### **Daily offerings**

In **Exodus 29:38-46**, God gave to Moses a key prescription for the daily offerings. They were to offer a lamb morning and evening, ***“One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight”*** (v.39). With the offering of the lamb there was a drink offering and a grain offering. Jesus is the Lamb who offered Himself for us and he left us with the grain and the drink offering to remember Him by. The Lord’s Table is the fulfillment of the daily offering and is meant to be a central part of our daily offering. The first church in Acts were devoted to the breaking of bread and they did this daily in the houses (**Acts 2:46**).

In **Romans 12:1-2** Paul beseeches us to ***“offer your bodies as a living sacrifice”***. In the context this is our ***“reasonable service”*** which has the sense of worshiping God. Then Paul says to ***“be transformed by the renewing of your mind”***. This is the summary of our daily offering: we offer our whole life to God and we ***“set our mind on things above”*** (**Col.3:2**).

Each of us needs to have a personal and real walk with God every day and to enable that to happen we can establish in our daily lifestyle a specific time where we remember Jesus at His Table and we read His word. This can be the conduct of an individual person who lives on their own, but it is also meant to be the conduct of the household – those who share the house come together to remember Jesus, read His word and pray, being conscious of the needs of others. This is a real fulfillment of **Acts 2:42**, being devoted to ***“the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers”***.

**Bible reading plan.** We recommend to all believers a simple plan whereby we read the Bible through each year. For some this sounds like a big and difficult task, but in reality, it is a most rewarding exercise. We regard it as basic discipleship and exhort the brethren everywhere we go in ministry to begin reading the Bible on a disciplined daily basis.

### **Weekly Sabbaths**

God established the Sabbath as a day in which the people of God did no customary work and took time as families to worship God and to study His word. Traditionally most Christian churches have established Sunday as a time when the various households can gather for a corporate church meeting. Mostly this is done by going to a dedicated building, but more and more it is happening in house churches. The day of the week is not the issue, but the issue

is that God's people gather corporately in a local fellowship in a special and dedicated way to be God-focused and to draw apart from normal daily activities and concerns.

My wife and I rejoice to be part of the 'Sunday' meeting. We belong to a congregation of approximately 25 souls. Our meetings are very collaborative with nearly all contributing in some way, including children. This gives ownership to each member as they realise they have a contribution to make, which might be as simple as reading a Scripture. We sit in a circle, not in rows, and we do not set the order of service but allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide.

### **New Moons**

The Hebrew calendar was based on the moon cycle, and there was to be a specific and dedicated acknowledgement of the new moon by the people of God. This can be fulfilled in a monthly gathering, where the various local fellowships [house churches] come together for a community celebration. It is the opportunity for the saints to meet up with brethren from other local fellowships, to hear testimony and news of what is happening in the various churches. In our case here in Toowoomba, we often include Saturday as a special training day that the saints can attend from all over.

It is this community of believers [the gathering of the local house churches and sometimes representatives from regional areas] that send teams out on mission both within Australia and overseas. It is in the community gatherings that guest ministries can be invited in to release the word through the ministry gift that they have. For example, at our recent community Saturday, we had a prophetic teacher come who spoke to us very powerfully.

### **The annual feasts**

Three times a year all the men of Israel were to gather in the place of God's appointment and celebrate the Feasts: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. We do not seek to do this specifically, but our practice is to have two intensive training schools each year [two to three weeks in duration]. These schools are like feasts for us. God honours us with His presence and His power as we continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, including prophets, teachers and pastors, worshiping God, celebrating the Table of the Lord and praying together as a community in agreement.

We generally say at each school 'this is the best school ever'. What we mean is that it is always wonderful to come into God's presence over a period of days and weeks and seek Him together. The anointing builds, the expectation builds and often God speaks to us in ways that shape our ongoing ministry for the coming year. These schools are international as often ministers from other nations are able to attend. Brethren gather from many different parts of Australia and overseas.

## **THE CHURCH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**

As we grow in the experiential knowledge of the word, we are meant to discover the pattern of how to live with God in the earth. The church is His body; the church is the corporate temple and the church is to be built in the earth in every generation, *"Having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom, you also have been built together for a dwelling place of God in the*

***Spirit***” Eph. 2:20-22. This does not sound like a description of the contemporary church, but it does sound like a living reality of God in the midst of His people. Hallelujah!

The apostles and prophets are the necessary foundation for the church in general and for each specific fellowship. Paul knew which churches related to him, receiving him as the apostle. We also see Agabus, a prophet, being received in the churches (Acts 11:27-29).

### **The Synagogue pattern is not for the church**

There are very few references in the New Testament as to the conduct of worship meetings/services, but the references that are there need to be noted. The church of the New Testament did not replace the Synagogue. It is a big mistake to assume that the early church simply followed the pattern of the Synagogue meeting. In history the church was actually thrown out of the Synagogue; believers were finally not allowed to take part in Synagogue meetings. For example, Paul began his ministry in Corinth reasoning in the Synagogue (Acts 18:4). After some time, he was forced to leave the Synagogue and he began meetings in the house ***“next door to the Synagogue”*** (Acts 18:7). Verse 8 tells us that the ruler of the Synagogue ***“believed on the Lord with all his household”***.

It is time to ‘return to the house!’. This is the meeting place of the believers scripturally.

*[Please take the time to study the book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul to find some of the many references to the church meeting and functioning in the houses of believers.]*

### **The practice of the early church**

The very first church, which formed from the Day of Pentecost when ***“three thousand souls were added”*** (Acts 2:41), functioned daily from house to house, continuing steadfastly ***“in the apostles’ doctrine, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers”*** (Acts 2:42). They also broke bread daily in the houses (v.46). It was not like a Synagogue meeting at all. It was not formal; there was no clergy/laity division; the whole family was involved and the reality of the word and the presence of Jesus in the Table and in the prayers was the experience of every member of the house church, which of course included women and children. It was well over a hundred years later that the church began to meet in dedicated buildings and taking upon themselves an order of service which did not reflect the pattern and practice of Scripture.

### **Every member contributing**

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul gives us a fleeting insight into the house church meeting: ***“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each one of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”*** Paul goes on to say that numbers of people may be able to prophesy, others will bring a message in tongues and there needs to be an interpretation (v.27). This Scripture passage suggests a very collaborative style of meeting. There is no clergyman dominating or necessarily leading the meeting. Paul suggests that every member of the meeting can have a particular contribution, in the word and by the Spirit. This type of house church meeting is awesome because everybody is able to be involved; everybody has a sense of ownership and feels a responsibility to be a contributor as this is the expression of church and God is alive in the midst.

## The place of prayer

In **1 Timothy 2:1** Paul exhorts concerning prayer. The context is the church meeting together, and prayer *“for all men, for kings and all in authority”* (v.1-2) should be entered in to. So many church meetings do not take the responsibility to pray for the Government of their nation, their State, their local city etc. The church is meant to be ruling and reigning in the nation through *“supplications, prayers, intercessions, and the giving of thanks”* (1Tim.2:1), and this is of primary importance.

## The reality of church in the house

For decades I have been committed to church in the house and I have had a range of experiences over the years, hosting the church in my home and being part of house meetings in Australia in many different places: in suburbs of cities, in towns and in isolated rural areas, and in many different nations. In the twenty-one years of our apostolic ministry so far, we have approved and authorised the meeting of the church in houses.

In recent years here in Toowoomba, God has enabled us to more fully plant the church in houses and witness the growth of the members of each house church. In one of the house churches, a child has taught the word, a sister who is a wife and mother, has now stepped up to teach the word. In another of the house churches, we have seen the neighbours in that area being converted to Christ and baptised. The baptisms are done in an inflatable swimming pool at the house!

## CONCLUSION

It is my intention to ask you all to seriously consider the conduct of **the church which is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets**. I am assuming that you receive apostles and prophets and that you acknowledge from **Ephesians 2:20** and other verses that these ministries are foundational and essential for the establishment of the church in the earth according to the Biblical record. We have so much church tradition and practice to overcome and one of the most obvious examples is the practice of a ministry team and individuals ministering from the front of the meeting while the majority of the congregation are little more than an audience.

Every minister's goal should be -

- the *“equipping* [perfecting, setting the church in order to function] *of the saints,*
- *for the edifying* [building up] *of the body of Christ”*.
- This is *“the work of the ministry”* (**Eph.4:12**) of all apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

Paul Galligan