Church Buildings, Sermons, & Worship Services

Where did these things come from?
Is there a better way of doing church?
Is there a more *biblical* way of doing church?

Introduction

"Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." [3John 1:2]

The point of this paper is summed up by the above verse. After all, if the intention of biblical instruction is not for the health and prosperity of the body of Christ (and the glory of God), it is worthless – it is sin. In this paper I wish to attack wrong doctrine and practice, but not fellow saints who may be preaching wrong doctrine or who may be engaged in wrong practice… I certainly am not without such shortcomings in my own life.

So let us now ask some thought-provoking questions about practices that we engage in without ever questioning their origins or scriptural basis:
Why do we build church buildings filled with rows and rows of pews?

Why do most church leaders teach primarily through the use of sermons?

Where did the idea and the format for a "worship service" come from?
Did you ever wonder about these things and whether or not there is any scriptural basis for them or whether or not the Bible teaches alternatives to these and other things related to the organization and structure of the local church? Well, I had often wondered why I felt like something was missing or not quite right in the many local churches I have attended and even been a member of. Now, after many years of being involved in "churchianity" and after questioning what I have been taught by the examples of the churches, I have discovered – through Bible study and through the help of others – that the way most churches do church is not scriptural. This paper will perhaps challenge your thinking and perhaps reveal to you why you may have felt that things were not quite right in churches you have been in.

Some more questions about church buildings…

What is the scriptural basis for meeting in the conventional church building considering that the scriptural pattern for the New Testament church was to meet in the homes of the believers?
Is it so that our worship of God will be enhanced?

Is it because houses are not big enough?

Is it so that people in the community will know where to find Christians?

Is it perhaps because we have the wrong idea of why we are to assemble together on the Lord's day?

Questions about sermons…

Why is there a sermon – a monologue – every week, one that you dare not interrupt with your own comments, questions, or corrections?

Were sermons the norm for the weekly Lord's Day meetings of the NT church or was there a lot of interactive dialog?

Is preaching the best way to teach or is a "question and answer" format more effective?

Is preaching actually a less effective teaching method but it is being done simply because interactive communication would be more difficult or even chaotic when dealing with a large group of people?

And what about worship services?…

Where did the idea of today's "worship service" come from?

Are we pleasing God by gathering together as a large group of believers, and then when we get together, we basically ignore each other?

Are all believers supposed to be participating and using their gifts in the church meeting or is participation primarily the responsibility and privilege of a few people like those who sing up front, the pastor who preaches the sermon and the deacons who serve as ushers and money collectors?
Let us look to the Word of God and see what we can find about how scriptural these practices are and whether or not we should be doing things differently in any areas of how we do church.

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS ARE A TRADEMARK OF THE UNSAVED

Where do the unsaved look for God?

First of all the unsaved are not *honestly* looking for the true God because "none seeketh after God" (Romans 3:11). No one who is unsaved will look for God in spirit and in truth. They will look for idols to worship because that is what their sin nature wants to worship. They will never seek to worship a God who says they are condemned hell-deserving sinners and who says "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). If a person does get converted by God, they are in big trouble these days if they go into the average "Christian" church to look for truth and for true worshippers to fellowship with. The Bible tells us not to look for God in temples made with hands…

"Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet" [Acts 7:48].

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands." [Psa 115:1-4]

But church buildings and temples are typically where the unsaved will look for God. They look to "holy men" who live in "holy temples". However, their holy men are only self-righteous sinners in God's eyes and their holy temples are just whitewashed tombs – nice looking buildings where the spiritually dead gather to worship their idols…

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." [Matt 23:27].

Groves and high places

When we look at the nation of Israel in the Old Testament we see that at any given time, when they were in the will of God, they had only ONE tabernacle or ONE temple, since God told them to build ONE specific temple. But when we look at the apostasy of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, we see that the people built places of worship on *every* high hill. They started to worship many gods and they had a desire to "build", to do "religious works" in the form of religious construction projects…

"For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree." [1Kings 14:23]

Should Christians think that God is happy whenever they build or expand a church building?

"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" [Acts 17:24]

Should we be building temples that hinder fellowship and drain finances when we could be busy about our Father's business: proclaiming the Gospel and doing more to support missionaries?

Do believers need specialized buildings for worship?

The Bible does not say anywhere that temples or special purpose religious buildings are a necessary or recommended part of New Testament church worship. One of the things that distinguished the early church from the

heathens was that the heathens had their religious temples, but in contrast to them, the early church met in ordinary homes, not in specially designed religious structures…

*"Likewise greet the church that is **in their house**. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ." [Rom 16:5]*

*"The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is **in their house**." [1Cor 16:19]*

*"Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is **in his house**." [Col 4:15]*

*"And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church **in thy house**" [Phm 1:2]*

Most Christians are not taught these things in the churches they attend. If most churches were run the scriptural way (meeting in homes led by elders who were trained by self-supporting men in the local congregation), the seminary trained pastors would be out of a job. What the unsaved need to see is not a building, but rather believers who are so busy about the Lord's work that the unsaved will know who the believers are and where they live.

Where does the living God dwell?

The living God dwells in all true believers in Christ…

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" [1Cor 3:16]

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." [2Cor 6:16]

So then, where will the unsaved find Christ? If the world is to find Christ, they are to find Him in us…

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" [Col 1:27]

"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." [Luke 17:20-21]

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." [1Pet 2:5]

"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" [1Cor 3:16]

The above verses may have several meanings or applications, but it is accurate to sum them up by saying that God is not building buildings, nor is He interested in doing so. Man is building buildings. Man prefers to spend his time and money on that rather than hitting the streets to preach the Gospel, especially if he is not saved (though there are exceptions like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons). On the other hand, God is building an eternal kingdom of believers. It is easy to lose sight of that fact if we refer to a building as the thing that we call church, as compared to the gathering of believers. It is also a good thing, and it has always been a good thing, in God's eyes, for His people to look and act differently from the world – **and to do church differently from the world**.

"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" [2Cor 6:16-17]

Outward appearances – a FORM of godliness

The unsaved use buildings and temples to give them a form of godliness and to give them self-righteousness and a sense of having done their religious obligation to God for the week. So, it is better that God's people avoid those things, else God's people may start thinking that their righteousness is in outward appearances also…

"But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart2." [1Sam 16:7]

There are lots of highly visible and very beautiful "Christian" church buildings, but most of them are dead, near dead, or full of serious error in doctrine and in practice… *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." [Matt 23:27].* This verse can apply to a local congregation as well as individual believers. My study on "What most churches don't teach their members" elaborates on the issue of how the majority of churches are teaching wrong doctrine or neglecting to teach basic and essential doctrines. I am not just making an unqualified statement as you will see if you read that paper.

What does it mean to "not forsake the

assembling of ourselves together”

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” [Heb 10:25]

Many people feel they have done their Christian duty – regarding Hebrews 10:25 – if all they do with the rest of the congregation is sit with them in a building for one hour a week listening to a sermon (and maybe give a tithe or offering). They can say to themselves, “I have gone to church… I did not forsake the assembling of believers”…

If we think that the above verse means sitting in a pew for an hour, we are seriously mistaken. We cannot exhort one another if we never speak to the people around us when we gather together. Scripture tells us that when the early church got together *“… they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” [Acts 2:42].*

Regarding fellowship in particular, much interaction is required if that fellowship is to be meaningful. That interaction is comparable to the degree of interaction between the parts of the human body. We can vividly see this comparison in the analogy Paul made (and God makes) when relating the Church to the human body…

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.” [1Cor 12:12-20]

The human body is a collection of parts that all have an important job to do together and thatdepend on each other. For optimum performance, all parts must be in place and all parts must be actively performing their role. We do not have a complete church body when we have a pastor, a choir director and some ushers. Nor is it their job to briefly entertain spectators once or twice a week. The body of Christ consists of children of a heavenly Father. Those children not only have a very intimate relationship to their heavenly Father but they should also have a close relationship to one another, just as a husband and wife are to have a close relationship to each other. Regrettably, I have seen people in stores who seem to have more of a relationship to the clerk they buy cigarettes and lottery tickets from than the average Christian has with the people sitting next to him in the pew…

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." [1John 4:20-21]

In a home church it is very easy for everyone to get involved in the service and in each other's lives and to put their gifts to use, as long as the people don't just transplant a conventional church into a home environment. But rather they have interactive meetings where people are free to:

1. request songs and even write and sing their own songs (Col 3:16)

2. request prayer (1Thes 5:11, Gal 6:2, Acts 1:14)

3. ask questions and make comments during the study of the Word (1Cor 14:31)

4. bring food for a fellowship meal (1Cor 11:33) providing a setting where people can interact very informally as they would around the family dinner table.

REMEMBER… WE ARE TO MODEL A FAMILY – A HOUSEHOLD! (Gal 6:10, Eph 2:19, 1Pet 4:17, Eph 3:14-15) LET'S GET THIS INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH SYSTEM OUT OF OUR HEADS! IT IS UNBIBLICAL! YES! U-N-B-I-B-L-I-C-A-L! (as we will continue to show) BUT THERE IS A WONDERFUL BIBLICAL ALTERNATIVE! (as you will see also)

VIEWING CHURCHES AS CONGREGATIONS NOT AS BUILDINGS

What does God mean in the Bible when He speaks of the "church"?

1. a structure built for the preaching of sermons OR

2. an assembly of believers

Well, in the Greek, the word translated as "church" is "ekklesia" (Strong's # 1577) and it occurs 118 times. Ekklesia is translated as "church" 115 times and as "assembly" 3 times (in the KJV). Out of all those times that this word appears in the New Testament, guess how many times it refers to a building? ZERO! Every instance where the word "church" is used, the words "congregation" or "assembly" could just as well be used. If you try substituting the word "building" or "church building" in all 115 instances, the passages won't make sense (most of the time). When God talks about the "church" He means the group of believers who make up a local congregation for a city, or some other geographic area OR in the context of the entire body

of believers in heaven and on earth and to come. The Bible says that the local church is a household, a family, and even OUR family if we are truly in Christ…

"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named" [Eph 3:14-15]

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." [Gal 6:10]

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" [Eph 2:19]

If we view the church as a family we can better understand that it is OK and GOOD for our church meetings to be similar to a weekly family reunion, rather than a weekly family funeral service. Can you imagine attending a family reunion that is run like a conventional church service where you are told what to do, what not to do, what to say, when to stand, when to sit, when to greet someone, etc.? How long would you stay at such a reunion? Would you not think that there was something seriously wrong with that family? And yet we think that it is perfectly OK to do church that way… primarily because **that is the way we have always done it.** But is it right OR should we change the way we do things so that we can do a better job of pleasing the Lord and making disciples?

What does man usually associate with the word "church"?

Well I don't know about you, but when I grew up and our family said they were going to church, they meant "the building". They were not referring to a group of Christians. We know how proud people can be of the structures that they erect. But what does God want us to be able to boast about? Ornate buildings or our congregation's desire to minister to each other?…

"For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many." [2Cor 9:1-2]

The design of a building relates to its function

Ask yourself these simple questions: Are most conventional church buildings built like the Catholic cathedrals of centuries ago or do they remind you more of the living room in your home? Which environment do you think is better suited towards fostering fellowship and interaction? Not very tough questions to answer are they? When we read 1Corinthians chapters 11 through 14 we see a very interactive church meeting that is far different than what we experience in the typical church nowadays. On the Lord's Day, the early

church had a meal together and spent a good deal of time fellowshipping together which included praying and studying the scriptures.

If today's churches are trying to pattern their services after the Catholic church, then they are doing a great job. Like the Catholic cathedrals, our churches have row and rows of pews. We usually think that the more pews we have, the better off we are. In place of the Catholic altar we usually have our communion table up front. However, unlike most tables in our homes, we never sit around that communion table. In fact, we probably never even touch that table. Don't you think the disciples sat (or reclined) around the table during the last supper? And didn't they have a meal together at that time… after all, what is a supper? Sadly, without ever questioning why we do what we do, we have replaced intimacy and involvement in the lives of others with cold formalism and outward show. Why do you think the typical conversation before or after a conventional church service consists of nothing more than some meaningless terse exchange like: "How are you?", "I'm fine and how are you?" If you invite someone into your living room you can be sure that the conversation will consist of much more than "How are you?" … "I'm fine."!

Once we learn that a church service is not supposed to be a spectator sport, we will realize that we do not need or want to build buildings, especially ones that are like arenas, auditoriums or movie theaters.

A look at building funds

I wish more believers would get more excited about biblical doctrine and about preaching the Gospel than about building funds. A need to expand a church building may appear to be a sign of success and growth, but in reality, it may mean that we are only becoming more successful at entertaining spectators or better at spreading bad doctrine that doesn't offend anyone. Before we get too preoccupied with building funds, perhaps we should meditate on verses like these:

"And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." [Mark 13:1-2]

And before we get too excited about crowded church buildings we should ask ourselves if these verses apply to us:

"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets." [Luke 6:26]

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." [2Tim 4:3]

"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" [Jer 5:31]

When believers meet in homes, there is no financial pressure to compromise the truth in order to ensure that the bills are paid, assuming that the leadership are not burdening the saints by expecting monetary compensation for services rendered. Furthermore, the local church should not be devouring widow's houses (i.e. draining the finances of struggling church members). We should be assisting those members who are in financial need – using the money that currently goes into building maintenance and expansion. It is a grievous sin to funnel huge amounts of money into buildings when there are poor members of the congregation whose needs should be tended to and when there are missionaries to be supported. Sell the building, start meeting in homes and use the newfound finances to help a poor widow or the parents with large families pay their rent, utility, food and medical bills. And start giving more towards the spreading of the Gospel!

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." [Matt 23:14]

CHURCH SERVICES – THE CONTENT AND FOCUS OF GATHERING ON THE LORD'S DAY

What exactly is a "worship service"?

I can't tell you what a "worship service" is by looking at the Bible because it does not mention this term nor does it describe this activity as we know it. However I can determine what a NT Sunday church meeting was like. Let's look at the kind of church meeting the early church had…

"If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all" [1Cor 14:23-24]

Apparently it was OK and probably the norm, for all to prophesy (expound the Word of God) – as long as it was done decently and in order. We can find confirmation of that conclusion a few verses later…

*"For ye may **all** prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." [1Cor 14:31]*

"You may all prophesy" means that everyone could get involved in the

teaching but they were to do it “one by one” (i.e. in an orderly fashion).

“How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.” [1Cor 14:26-30]

Does this sound like everyone was sitting in pews listening to one man preach a sermon nonstop for an hour? Brothers and sisters, we must reeducate ourselves regarding what is supposed to happen when believers come together on the Lord’s Day….

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” [Acts 2:42].

Let’s not miss another important point of 1 Corinthians 14:24 – “*But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all” .* We see here that if all the people (all the men, that is) are allowed to be involved in the proclamation of truth and are interacting with all in attendance, the congregation will be better able to discern who knows what and they will be better able to disciple those who are unsaved (i.e. “one that believeth not”) or who are babes in Christ (i.e. “one unlearned”).

Our own inventions…

“Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.” [Psa 106:39]

Like the Israelites who were not satisfied with God and His ordinances, we have invented something of our own called a “worship service”. However, the purpose of gathering together on the Lord’s day is not to sit like a bump on a log for an hour or so during a sermon and when not doing that, playing Simon-Says… Simon says: “sing praise song #105”, Simon says: “please rise”, Simon says: “please be seated while we focus on these immodestly dressed singers”, Simon says: “please greet one another”, Simon says: “please look at your bulletin”, Simon says: “let us pray (but I don’t really mean “us”, just myself, the pastor)”, Simon says: “let us study the Word of God (but I don’t really mean study, since no one is allowed to make comments or ask questions)”, Simon says: “the show is over so clear out of here so we can turn off the lights and shut the doors and so you can go back home to your TV sets”. Oh, wasn’t that great fellowship! I can hardly wait for next week’s show! But do I even know everyone’s name in the congregation, never mind their gifts or their needs? Shame on us for calling such a thing “church”!

"He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." [Mark 7:6]

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." [2Tim 3:5]

Brothers and sisters, we were meant to be God's gift to each other, to be a blessing to one another. But this cannot happen if we continue to play the church game and stay out of each other's homes and lives. Quality time together is just as essential to spiritual life and growth in the local assembly (church family) as in the home (immediate family).

Is evangelism supposed to be the focus of church services?

One reason I have heard of, for the use of our present-day church buildings, is so that we can bring in lots of people to hear the Gospel. The problem with that idea is that the Gospel is something we are to bring **out of** the church into the world and the preaching of the Gospel is every believer's job, not just the job of the elders of a church. We should be gathering together on Sundays to build relationships that will last into eternity and that will provoke the unsaved to envy:

"But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." [Rom 10:19]

We should be getting together to bear each other's burdens. But how can we do that if we don't interact with one another and find out what those burdens are?

"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." [Gal 6:2]

We should be having a fellowship meal together each Lord's Day as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11 and as referred to in Jude 12 (as feasts of charity).

"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another." [1Cor 11:33]

"These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots" [Jude 12]

SERMONS VERSUS INTERACTIVE STUDIES

Problems with sermons

Our modern day churches have pulpits to preach from that were probably borrowed from the church of Rome, although we pride ourselves in the modest construction of our pulpits compared to the elaborate furnishings of Catholic cathedrals. Yet, just by having a pulpit (or a microphone or something else that sets one man apart from the rest), we are forcing the church meeting to operate a certain way, a way that is not really good. Like a microphone in a radio studio, a pulpit is a great invention for those who want to do all the talking and want to completely control what is said without ever being challenged. All you have to do is convince the people that the best way for them to learn the Bible is by sitting back in a pew while someone tells them everything they need to know. Oh sure, you tell them to check what is preached with their Bibles, but then you never provide a forum for them to get timely answers to their questions. In fact, you convince the hearers that it is inappropriate to ask questions or to correct erroneous statements while others are present – others who also may have similar questions or who also heard the same erroneous statements. By having such a structure – one that hinders discussion and correction – church leaders can easily go down a wrong doctrinal path forever and they can also deceive the hearts of the simple…

For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." [Rom 16:18]

Where does the Bible say we need to be preached at for an hour every week, with no opportunity to ask questions or make comments? That kind of controlled, one-way teaching method is a carry-over from the Catholic church which spoons feeds its parishioners prepared dogma that is never open to question. Would there have been a Protestant Reformation if Martin Luther – and others like him – had not challenged people's teachings? Do you think Martin Luther had a chance to discuss doctrine in the middle of a Catholic mass? No. He had to put his concerns in writing or talk to people privately. A Catholic mass, like most conventional church services does not present a forum for the discussion of doctrinal issues (or a forum for correcting error on the spot) and it does not try to. **It is not much more than a religious show for religious spectators.**

Is there a time and place for sermons? Certainly, especially if there are a lot of people around who are not saved and you wish to get the Gospel message across to them as Paul did when he preached to unbelievers at Mar's Hill in Athens and when he preached to unbelievers in synagogues. You have no other choice but to preach a sermon when there are a lot of people in your meeting because it is too difficult for everyone there to have a chance to talk. But since the biblical pattern for the church is to meet in homes, you don't generally need to preach a sermon. Don't forget your own learning experiences in school and elsewhere. Did your teachers preach to you every day all day or did they interact with you, asking you questions to find out what

you were learning or not learning, and responding to your questions and comments?

Benefits of interactive Bible studies

Interactive Bible studies, if moderated properly (by an elder or the leader of the study), enhance learning in ways that are just not possible with sermons. If they are properly planned out by the teacher and if people are doing their homework (i.e. studying the Bible on their own each day) interactive studies can help people to learn from whoever has insight into a particular word or verse being studied. The congregation does not have to rely on the preacher to know everything. People are able to ask important questions, and receive scriptural answers to those questions **right away** AND the teacher is not up on a podium or pedestal, visually implying that he is the only one who should be talking during the study. Also, people in an interactive Bible study are able to make valuable comments, even people whom the world and the seminary graduates think are foolish and unlearned…

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence." [1Cor 1:26-29]

Size of the group is important

A house has an important feature to it that most church buildings do not. Houses usually are structured to limit the number of people in a room to about 20 at most, including children. This is a significant *positive* limitation because it actually ensures that the group will never get so big as to hinder participation by everyone. When the assembly grows beyond the point at which a home can accommodate everyone, you just split off into another home. Leaders will already be apparent to the group because of their intimate involvement in each other's lives.

Summary of problems with conventional churches and modern-day church services:

The need to support and maintain buildings takes money away from those in need.

True fellowship is difficult if not impossible with everyone sitting in rows and no one talking to anyone for most – if not all – of the service.

Less fellowship results in less accountability or accountability turns into legalism – looking at outward appearances, superficial flaws, or obvious weaknesses, because you don't ever get to know the people. Also, discipline

usually only occurs after highly visible and highly offensive sins are committed.

Non-interactive meetings hinder the use of people's gifts and talents.

The one-way communication of sermons results in unchecked error.

The formality and shallowness of today's worship services merely give an outward appearance of righteousness.

Churches and the format of the services performed in them enables people to keep from getting involved in each other's lives… if you don't want to make yourself vulnerable to correction and available for ministry you just sit in your pew and no one will really ever get to know you.

Meeting in special-purpose church buildings makes it easy for you to keep people *out* of your home. The home – not the conventional church building – should be a central point of evangelism and ministry since you spend far more time in your home than in a church building during the course of a week and it is an excellent forum for fellowship and one-on-one discipleship. WHEN PEOPLE SEE WHERE YOU LIVE, HOW YOU LIVE AND HOW YOU INTERACT WITH YOUR FAMILY AND WITH OTHER BELIEVERS, THEY REALLY KNOW *YOU*. THIS "TRANSPARENT" ENVIRONMENT IS A MUCH SAFER SETTING, SPIRITUALLY, FOR THE BELIEVERS IN THE LOCAL CHURCH TO OPERATE IN.

The use of special-purpose and typically large church buildings is contrary to the scriptural pattern of meeting in homes.

Modern-day structured non-interactive worship services are contrary to the biblical pattern of highly interactive church meetings.

Conclusions

Where do we go from here? It is plain and simple. The true Church, the true body of believers needs to sell off their edifices, go back to meeting in homes and go back to the Bible (1 Corinthians chapters 11 through 14 and elsewhere) to learn how to run an interactive church meeting. That is basically what I ended up doing. I did not personally own a church building but I and others I know have left the religious system we had gotten caught up in and by the grace of God, are now worshipping God more accurately, more truthfully and more joyfully! Praise God!

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and ***they that worship him***

***must worship him in spirit and in truth**.” [John 4:20-24]*

We don’t have to do things a certain way just because that is the way we learned to do things. If we are doing things contrary to Scripture, it is sin to continue to do so, especially after we have been informed of our errors. While we cannot expect everybody in all the traditional churches to conform to scripture overnight, we can start studying these issues more, and we – as individuals and as families – can gracefully move on to home churches. The key word here is gracefully. We must be patient with others who are locked into the traditional way of doing things. Once God reveals to us that we should move on, then let us be obedient to Him. But let us not try to drag others with us, kicking and screaming. And we must present our reasons for leaving in a humble way, not in a critical or condescending way.

“Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” [Col 3:12-17]

— RM Kane
