

The Christian and the local Church: An update

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Preface

This document was originally written in 2002 while my family and I were searching for a fellowship of like-minded Christians that we could join with. We visited with Jon Zens and found him to be a gracious and helpful host. As I explain below this was written for various reasons and no disregard was or is intended to Jon Zens or to anyone else, as a person. After sending this to Jon Zens and to Cliff Bjork I went in a different direction which ultimately led to the start of the Surrey Tabernacle Website which I started in 2015. Frankly, I more or less forgot about this subject until it came very recently (June 2019). At that time, I learned about a new term: "THE OPEN CHURCH" I had no idea what this stood for but I did not like the way it was presented on the internet in cartoon form. The depictions of God and our Lord Jesus Christ raised serious warning bells. More than that it just did not ring true. My initial Web search brought the up the

name “Jon Zens” frequently and it was obvious that he is deeply involved with the movement. The more I saw the more concerned I became.

Since then I have written an in-depth review of Frank Violas book “Reimagining Church” which I plan to post on [Surrey Tabernacle Pulpit](#). I am deeply dismayed to see how far toward mysticism this teaching has gone in these few short years.

The Searching Together Website no longer posts the contents of past issues but almost all the issues can be obtained for a very modest amount of money. I would encourage those who truly want to know the truth to examine both the Bible and what these ‘modern’ teaches expound to see where the truth lies.

Finally, as I have grown older, I have hopefully also grown wiser in the Lord Jesus. Certainly, He is more precious to me now than He was then. Though he has always been precious in my eyes since my conversion in 1971. If I were to re-write this today, I would quote different sources, I would give much more attention to the Greek words, and I would give more prominence to The Lord Jesus Christ but my doctrinal understanding would hardly change.

Introduction

1. Why was this paper written?

The apostle John warns us about false spirits; “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”¹

There is a spirit abroad in the world today. It could be called the 'spirit of this age', the age of the new millennium. You can see it everywhere, on television, in the newspaper, in the work place and even in the true Christian Church. It is the 'spirit of equality'. We must all be equal. The rich must share what they have earned with those who are 'less fortunate'. Schoolwork must be curved so that no one fails; the brightest are brought to the level of the dumbest. We are concerned here with how this spirit manifests its self in the body of true believers. I will use the term 'open church' to refer to this philosophy as it manifests its self in the true body of believers. I am not aware of who first advocated this teaching, though many from different backgrounds are promoting it today.

The Bible is a completely objective standard. It provides a framework of truth that does not and indeed cannot, change with the changing times. It is the true Christian's only perfect rule or guideline. Those who promote the 'open church' idea use the Bible to substantiate their beliefs. It is not my purpose or intent to fully examine all the teachings of those who promote the open-worship doctrine. It is however, to examine the main foundations of this teaching based on what the Bible teaches us. In doing so it is hoped that we will gain a clear understanding of what the Bible has to say on the subject of the individual Christian, leadership and the local Church.

For a number of years, I was very taken with the teachings that I now oppose. At first glance it is attractive and appears to have a solid foundation in the Bible. The actual facts as we shall see are far different. I feel a deep regard and respect for one advocate of the open church position. Jon Zens has been a real blessing to others and myself on a variety of subjects. No disrespect is intended to him or anyone else in the following pages. This is, however, an important matter and personal regards must take second place to the truth.

Even a of casual reading of what follows will reveal the fact that much of what I call the 'open church' teaching has been taken from the periodical "Searching Together" which is edited by Jon Zens and Cliff Bjork. There are two reasons for this fact. First of all, an increasing amount of the material from "Searching Together" is available on their web site (www.searchingtogether.com). This gives the reader of this work the opportunity to examine this teaching and compare what is presented there with what I have written here. Secondly Jon Zens has made a very determined effort to portray the open church doctrine in the most favorable light possible. He appears to have searched far and

¹ 1 John 4:1, All Bible passages are taken from the King James Version.

wide for anyone who supports this position. This provides us with a wealth of material to work upon and indeed this is the professed purpose of his magazine: dialog, "speaking the truth in love", Ephesians 4:15, is Searching Together's motto.

2. What it's all about?

On the back cover of "The Open Church" by James H. Rutz² there is a brief summary of the book. This speaks of "three freedoms" that the early church of the 1st century had. These are stated to be pure worship, true sharing and free ministry. What this means in practice is the desire to remove any type of real authority from the local church. This is commonly spoken of as removing the clergy/laity distinction. As I said above all must become equal. Admittedly there are various ways in which this is presented, some more biblical than others. At heart though this is the proverbial 'bottom line'. By laying stress on a title, usually 'the minister' or 'the pastor' they cloud the issues in rhetoric by trying to show that the particular title of 'pastor' or 'minister' is not used in the Bible as we use it today. In practice they wish to replace the biblical office of Elder (or the equivalent word Bishop), with a great free for all in which everyone participates. There is little emphasis on content, though this differs between advocates of this teaching.

What would they replace true leadership with? Again, this varies to some extent, but participation of almost any form is advocated. Rutz's book though extreme is a good example. He advocates that 'laypersons' tell a story, preach, prophecy, sing a song and that they "get physical!" in the sense of kneeling, dancing and holding hands or as I would put it: to have one big free for all.³

As bad as this is there is an even more sinister side to this teaching. A real effort is being made to re-define truth. Not only must real leadership be negated or removed altogether but the very basis of truth itself is under attack. In their zeal to exult the importance of small local assemblies the advocates of this position would sweep away the truth that multitudes of Christ's faithful have labored and died to keep and bring down to us today.

3. How not to approach this subject.

The misuse of Scripture: Example number one

Rutz's book "The Open Church" illustrates one approach that is sometimes taken. His example as I have said is extreme. Many advocates are more Bible based but the same tendency can be seen in other books and articles on this subject.

The 'Open Church' is 175 pages long yet it contains almost no Bible references. The few that there are contain little substance. The following references show how he uses the Bible. On page 9 he cites Jude 12 in the following way "the love feast" (Jude 12). This is what he calls the "whoopie" part of the feast. The second passage is found on page 17. We are told that we will find examples of "pure worship" in Revelation 4 and 5 and Psalms like 23 and 139. On page 23 and continuing to page 24 there is a brief selection titled "Three clues from scripture". It is about one page in length and no actual passage references are given. There is an interesting sentence on page 31 where he references I Corinthians 12:7,11,13,27. He says that if you are a "earnest Christian" you have a ministry. I guess this is not true if you are a non-earnest Christian. On the strength of this he goes on to say "you are a minister of the gospel". He defines a ministry as the exercise of your spiritual gift(s). By implication everyone is a minister. Next on page 34 he uses I Corinthians 14 to show that anyone could say or do almost anything in the worship service. These are as I said examples in general of how the Bible is used in this book. The following passages deal more directly with the subject of the Open Church. He brings up the subject of elders on page 40 with a reference to Titus 1:5. In footnote 13 he references three other passages on the theme of elders. On page 69 he states that there are no New Testament passages that describe the modern-day pastor and that only Ephesians 4:11 even uses the word pastors. On page 106 He speaks about the "New Testament Church pattern" found in Acts 2:42-46. All he seems to mean is the idea of small groups of Christians. Act 2:41 states that three thousand people were saved in one day. Mr. Rutz is speaking in terms of six to eight people in a group. What Bible is he reading? Part Five of this book (pages 134 - 144) is titled "The Open Church is God's Idea. Here if anywhere we would expect to find some biblical bases for the "Open Church". In fact, this section contains no reference to the Bible at all. The final reference is on pages 161 - 162. This is also the most detailed taking up over one half of one page. Here he cites part of John 17. His teaching here is that only the "open

² James H. Rutz, The Open Church, (The SeedSowers, Box 3368, Auburn, Maine 04212, June 1992)

³ Ibid., 186

church" can bring the oneness that Christ prayed for. He goes so far as to say that this oneness has been missing for the past 1,700 years!

The misuse of Scripture: Example number two

The second example is the 1994 issue of "Searching Together" (Volume 22:1-4). This issue consists of an article by Cliff Bjork. The title is "Hermeneutics: Six essential principles of biblical Interpretation you won't find in the textbooks". His approach is quite different from Rutz's he quotes scripture to an extreme extent. The article is a carefully constructed effort to maximize the importance of the local body of believers with regard to the interpretation of scripture. It is a good example of what happens when we lose sight of the balance of truth and common sense at the same time. Common sense has a great deal to do with the understanding of scripture. When we negate the use of means and throw open the doors to mysticism we are in for trouble. As we shall see later Mr. Bjork does this and at the same time severely limits the truth. Everything is slanted to ensure that one ends up where he wants us to go. This article is filled to capacity with Bible verses. On the surface it appears to give great weight to what the Bible teaches. Unfortunately, such is not the case. The following is an example of how he treats the Bible in this article.

The first two paragraphs (which are quite small) contain nine references. Here is one example from the second paragraph. "When you were still in your sins, 'you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior' (Col. 1:21) You were 'hostile to God' (Rom. 8:7) and 'in slavery under the basic principles of the world' (Gal. 4:3)".⁴ There are some more detailed references but the article is filled with examples like the one above. Using the Bible in this way gives the impression of authority but it is without any real substance.

The misuse of Scripture: Example number three

This final example is more ingenious than the other two. Here biblical proof is assumed but not substantiated in any clear manner. Instead the teaching its self (in this case ten propositions) is elevated to the place normally held by scripture. The Third Quarter 1982 Volume 11:3 of Searching Together contains an article by Hal Miller who is an elder at the Salem Community Church. The Searching Together version is highly edited. For this reason, it is possible that the full forty-page version is more Bible based. The Searching Together version is titled "Leadership in the Church: Ten Propositions".

In his introduction Mr. Miller states:

*I have organized these insights in terms of ten propositions. This allows me to state conclusions without having to give a lot of attention to the biblical, theological, and practical reasons for adopting the positions taken. In this way, the whole picture of leadership can be seen in its entirety. Further, leadership can only be described inadequately: any description of it is at the same time a limitation. The propositions make this clear by giving a pointed description of what must be a living and active thing... It seems to me that when we form a church structure, we are working with one eye on our situation in culture and history, and the other eye on the values embodied in these propositions.*⁵

Proposition one is: "The most basic description of leaders is captured in the word 'Facilitators'".⁶

He states under this proposition that:

*It is clear that "facilitator" is not a biblical word; indeed, the whole concept may well be foreign to the N.T. This is not, however, much of an argument against the term itself, for the choice of terminology is a matter of translating biblical values into twentieth century forms. The N.T. is dramatic in its lack of emphasis on the role of leadership.*⁷

So we have one eye on something that by nature is constantly changing and the other on ten **man-made** propositions which by his own admission have little to do with the New Testament because the New Testament tells us almost nothing about the role of leadership (his teaching not mine). Relativism is to rule and the biblical teaching of absolute truth is abandoned. Add to this the fact that he starts out with terminology, i.e. "Facilitators", that by his definition is not Bible based. What place does the Bible play in all of this? Does it have any place at all in Mr. Miller's teaching? I'm sure that he would strenuously suggest that it does but own words provide a different testimony.

⁴ page 1

⁵ page 39

⁶ page 39

⁷ page 39

If Mr. Miller professed to be a non-believer or atheist one would not be surprised by his remarks. His remarks do however show what happens when what we want to believe becomes more important than what the Bible actually teaches. His whole premise is that the Bible gives us inadequate teaching on this subject nothing could be further from the truth.

We cannot omit the scriptures as Rutz does. This is not a sentimental 'how do we feel about it' subject. In the same way we cannot take just the passages that fit in with what we want to believe, minimizing, distorting and ignoring the rest. Finally, we cannot re-invent the Bible by inserting our own ideals. There is a true balance, and the closer we get to that balance the closer we will be to the truth. There are almost always two or more parts to every doctrine. God is love, but God is also a God of wrath. We can so stress the love part that we lose sight of the wrath part. In the same way we can manipulate the teaching of the Bible to the point where the importance of the 'local body ministry' over shadows everything else. I am not saying that the truth always lies in the middle of two extremes but that we must be able to see all aspects of a given problem before we can solve it correctly. Looking only at one part to the exclusion of the other parts seldom, if ever solves anything.

Hermeneutics

What is hermeneutics? The following quote, which is taken from the preface to Louis Berkhof's book "Principles of Biblical Interpretation", provides a good starting place:

Much of the present-day confusion in the realm of religion, and in the application of biblical principles, stems from distorted interpretation and misinterpretation of God's Word. That is true even in those circles which adhere unwaveringly to the infallibility of Holy Scriptures.

We are convinced that the adoption and use of sound principles of interpretation in the study of the Bible will provide surprisingly fruitful. We believe that this is one means, which "the Spirit of truth" is pleased to use in leading His people "into all truth".... The early adoption of valid procedure in biblical interpretation will lead the devoted worker to a life of useful service for the advancement of God's kingdom. ⁸

Hermeneutics is the science of the interpretation of the Bible. I deliberately use the word science as this stresses the importance of what Berkhof calls "sound principles of interpretation". The flyleaf of Berkhof's book states that it "discusses (1) The History of Hermeneutical Principles, (2) The Proper Conception of the Bible (3) Grammatical Interpretation (4) Historical Interpretation and (5) Theological Interpretation" ⁹ This gives us a broad overview of what the "sound principles" involve. One quote from the book is particularly apt: "Hermeneutics and Exegesis are related to each other as theory and practice. The one is a science, the other an art." ¹⁰

The three examples from part 3 above provide sufficient reason for examining this subject. This becomes even more important however, as the promoters of change are seeking to redefine the meaning of hermeneutics. The "sound principles" that have been of such immense benefit to Christendom are under attack. What is truth? How can we answer this question? They are providing false answers for these questions.

Cliff Bjork, for example limits the definition of hermeneutics to suit his own ends. This can be seen in the introduction, to the article "Hermeneutics: Six essential principles of biblical Interpretation you won't find in the textbooks".¹¹ He defines hermeneutics as "... it is nothing more than a systematic process for deriving the Holy Spirit's intended meaning out of any given passage of scripture in order to 'find out what pleases the Lord'." ¹² He bases this definition on a presupposition. In the first paragraph of the introduction he stated the following. "... there can be no higher motive for searching scripture than to simply 'find out what pleases the Lord' (Eph. 5:10)" ¹³ Everything that follows is based on this narrow interpretation of what hermeneutics is. As we progress through the article the narrowing continues unabated.

Louis Berkhof with true insight gets it right. Under the heading "b. The purpose of God's revelation" he brings out the fact that God's purpose is **His own glory**.¹⁴ This is the ultimate purpose in God's giving us the Bible and consequently it is the main purpose of hermeneutics. When we want to see truth only from our own prospective and not from God's prospective first, we will never arrive at the truth. God's truth is completely objective, it is unchanging, just as God Himself never changes or varies. In many respects the way to truth is also unchanging. I question the very premise of a "new" hermeneutical method. It's not a question of what it subjectively means to me or to any particular group of people. If we ignore, negate, or in any way take away from the sound principles that have been proven true by countless Christians over the centuries we will end up in error. There is nothing more sacred or spiritual about what a small local assembly believes as opposed to an individual or an institution. It is a matter of each individual setting aside his or her preconceptions and prejudice. We must truly love God and put Him first in our lives no matter what the cost.

What we believe is of vital importance to ourselves, but our duty is to use **all** the means that God has provided, not just those we arbitrarily think are important. It is important for any group of Christians to understand and agree upon

⁸ L. Berkhof, B. D., Principles of Biblical Interpretation, Copyright 1950 by L. Berkhof, (Grand Rapids Michigan: Baker Book House, sixteenth printing, Feb. 1980) preface

⁹ Ibid., flyleaf

¹⁰ Ibid., 13

¹¹ 1994 edition of Searching Together, Vol. 22:1-4

¹² Ibid., 2

¹³ Ibid., 1

¹⁴ Berkhof, 58

that which they believe. It is, however, much more important that what they believe is in harmony with what God has revealed to us in the Bible and to the extent that this agrees what we have learned through the ages in the lives and teaching of his true saints. We may need to disagree with the main body of orthodox Christians, on the fundamental aspects of faith, in some very specific situations but this is very rare, the extreme exception rather than the rule. If we do disagree, we must have **substantial proof from the Bible** as to what and why we believe and why we differ. **Feelings** of peace, love, or unity have little importance here; **facts** based on sound interpretation of the Bible are the necessary prerequisites.

Obviously, there are matters of doctrine that cause division among the body. One classic example is Calvinism and Arminianism. We cannot go into detail about this controversy at this time but it illustrates an important principle. Currently in the United States and in some other countries the Arminian doctrine is the dominant belief. Historically, however Calvinism has predominated.

The point is that these two represent opposing positions. In Calvinism God is sovereign, in Arminianism man is sovereign. In Calvinism God accomplishes all His purposes and desires, in Arminianism God fails and most of those He died to save perish and consequently frustrate His purpose. There is no middle ground here. We can come up with high sounding terms and arguments, but the basic facts do not change. The Bible supports one position not both. There need not be any division over this matter, the teaching of the Bible is crystal clear, and anyone who honestly wanted to know the truth on this matter could easily do so. The fact is that we do not want to accept the truth. The Bible is not at fault; hermeneutics is not the problem. Our refusal to bow the knee to God is what is wrong.

Even among Calvinists there is sometimes an obstinate refusal to accept the clear teaching of scripture. The Banner of Truth Trust demonstrated this when they published "The Sovereignty of God" by A.W. Pink.¹⁵ Baker Book House also publishes this work. The Baker edition is unedited and consequently contains about one third more material than the Banner edition. In at least one place the Banner of Truth Trust inserted a word not found in the original and added a footnote both of which I feel go against what Pink was teaching.¹⁶ The Banner of Truth Trust is so biased in some areas of doctrine that they felt compelled to take such drastic measures with one of the best books ever written on the sovereignty of God. It would have been more honest of them not to publish the book at all rather than corrupt Pink's clear teaching by taking out whole sections and changing others.

The pages of Searching Together provide other examples of this attack upon traditional hermeneutics. One such example can be found in the winter 1984 issue, Vol. 13:4. Starting on page two there is an article by Joe Higginbotham and Paul Patton titled "'Hermenetworks': Rank and File Hermeneutics". They state that the "question of hermeneutics"¹⁷ is about how to understand what God is telling us. They give a good textbook definition of what Hermeneutics is and then state "Practically, though the hermeneutical question is not that easy to answer".¹⁸ They then ask: "How can I hear the voice of Jesus above the din of those who claim to be his representatives?"¹⁹ They list four methods that have been used in the past. These are institutional hermeneutics, clergy hermeneutics, creedal hermeneutics and individual hermeneutics. The rest of the article is devoted to what they call "the 'hermeneutical body'".²⁰

There are two important factors that need to be highlighted. First of all, these four methods are presented as though they were mutually exclusive. We can choose one or another but not a mixture of two or more. Secondly, they are presented as the only possible options. Both of these are related and both are artificial, misleading, and false. As I stated in the preceding paragraph, any child of God who truly seeks after the truth will find the truth. We may be a group of one, of ten, or of millions. If we are open and humble before God and put His word first, He will bring us to an understanding of His word. I recently did an in-depth Bible study on the word 'wine' and its use in the Bible. A dear friend of mine and I differ on this subject and I wanted to understand as fully as possible what the Bible taught. When my friend read this paper, he agreed with my findings, that they were what the Bible taught. He refused, however to alter his views on the subject. My use of hermeneutic principles was not at fault; his prejudice was the reason he refused to change his opinion. 2 Timothy 4:2,3 illustrates this. Many people will hear only what they want to hear there is a deliberate action of closing the mind and admitting only what we want to believe.

¹⁵ The British revised edition was first published in 1961

¹⁶ See page 74 near the end of the chapter on the sovereignty of God in salvation.

¹⁷ page 2

¹⁸ page 2

¹⁹ page 2

²⁰ page 4

Joe Higginbotham and Paul Patton start their section on the "hermeneutical body" with this sentence: "Hermeneutics must be personal, not institutional: set in life, not in academia, set in a community of faith, not in the lonely isolation of the 'individual believer.'" ²¹ This is their primary presupposition. Hermeneutics, according to this scheme, is the job of the local body of believers and of no one else. It is, they say, not something that concerns academia or institutions. Clearly then they view hermeneutics as something that is basically unscientific. If we removed academia and institutions from any realm of science what would we have left?

Their definition of hermeneutics is founded upon four Bible passages. They state that "The same writer who warned us about 'private interpretation' (2 Peter 1:20) also tells us that the body of Christ forms a priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9)". ²² Here we find two of the four passages. We will examine 1 Peter 2: 5,9 which speaks of the priesthood of all believers, in some detail in a separate section the other two passages, 1 Cor. 12:17 and 1 Cor. 14:29 will also be dealt with later. That leaves us with 2 Peter 1:20. They omitted verse 21, but it is impossible to understand verse 20 without it so I am including it here.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Do these passages teach that it is wrong for the "individual believer" to interpret scripture (to practice the science of hermeneutics)? This is what they stated above in their definition. It is also clearly implied by the way that they reference verse 20. Unless they feel that there is some relevance why make this statement?

Verse 21 gives us the unequivocal answer. The Bible was not given to us by the will or power of human thought alone. Men moved by and under the power of the Holy Spirit spoke and wrote as they were directed to by the very power of God. Not human thought alone, but God working through man has given us the Bible. This verse has nothing to do with an individual's right to determine for themselves the correct meaning of any passage of scripture. This passage in no way supports their position. To use it in this way is dishonest and false. As we shall see the other passages also completely fail to support their conclusions.

John Zens, in the same issue of Searching Together, takes up this theme. In an article titled "No Humility / No Hermeneutics" he states the following:

One of the biggest stumbling blocks before a watching world is the division among Christians. It must be admitted that an individualistic perspective of the Christian life has contributed to the confusion. A letter to Christianity Today in early 1984 captures the essence of the problem: "Protestantism basically directs everyone to read the Holy Scriptures and then to form his or her personal opinion as to what the scriptures say; the logical end of this process can be nothing more than chaos amplified." ²³

Note the words "individualistic perspective of the Christian life". Christian Life, not the interpretation of scripture, is the subject. Faith, the basis of Christian life, is individualistic. Read Hebrews chapter eleven. Does it say that by faith a body of believers did such and such? No! The Word states that by faith Abel, by faith Enoch, by faith Noah and etc. Salvation is individualistic. This should be self-evident; birth as well as rebirth must by its very nature be individualistic. We come to know God as individuals, in the same way we learn to understand His word to have faith in what it tells us about Him. We can only assemble together on the basis of our individual understanding of the Bible and of our individual faith in God on the basis of this understanding. We must practice some form of hermeneutics in our daily private Bible study or the Bible will be meaningless to us. There is certainly a strong emphasis in the Bible on the interaction of Christians in fellowship with one another but to define hermeneutics as they have done is frankly absurd. More than that it is heresy. This false hermeneutical principle waters down the truth defeating its very purpose.

1 Corinthians 2:15 states: "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man".

Charles Hodge has this to say when commenting on this passage.

It is not of the officers of the church only, nor of the church collectively, but of each and every man in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, that the apostle affirms this ability to discern the truth, excellence and beauty of divine things. It is impossible that one man should discern for another what is true and good, as that one man should see for another. We

²¹ page 4

²² pages 4, 5

²³ Searching Together, Winter 1984, Vol. 13:4. Page 11

*must see for ourselves or not at all. **The right of private judgment in matters of religion, is inseparable from the indwelling of the Spirit.** Those who can see, have the right to see. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth, to open our eyes to discern it in its true nature, and to feel its power. It is on this demonstration of the Spirit, as taught above, that saving faith is founded. And as this demonstration is granted to everyone who has the Spirit, the faith of the Christian is founded neither on the wisdom of men nor on the authority of the church, and is subject to neither.*²⁴

The 'body is everything' advocates would take away our right to see for ourselves. As if this were not bad enough, they deny the Holy Spirit His proper place and power in the lives of individual believers. They deny the individual Christian his or her lifeblood in their blind zeal for false teaching. Their false teaching cannot be allowed stand.

How has God worked in the course of history after New Testament times? The answer is that He has most often advanced His truth through the ministry of one single person, an individual who has stood alone against all others. One example is St. Athanasius. His tombstone contains the following epithet in Latin, 'Athanasius against the world'. He withstood all the attacks of Satan against the divinity of Christ in the Arian controversy. Everyone knows of Martin Luther and his stand in the early Reformation. This list could go on almost forever. Men may divide over the lives and teaching of Augustine, Luther and Calvin, but how barren and empty our theology would be without them. If God had never worked through men like John Bunyan, or C. H. Spurgeon what heritage would we have today? The open church advocates show great disdain for this fact of history. In the lives and teaching of these and the many other great men and women of faith we find hermeneutics in action, a wealth of example and teaching. Ignore this fact we may, but only to our great cost and ultimate possible peril.

If hermeneutics is not personal and individual, the duty and work of each individual Christian, then it is nothing at all. Some may be called to make this science a major part of their life's work, but all true Christians must have and exercise the freedom to practice it in their daily life.

²⁴ Charles Hodge, A commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1974) 44, 45 (Emphasis mine)

Truth

1. Truth and Fellowship

The subject of hermeneutics and truth are closely related. We practice the science of hermeneutics in order to find truth. What then is truth? How important is it? Is Christian unity more important than biblical truth?

The prophet Isaiah said, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." The Old Testament has an objective standard of truth.²⁵

The apostle Paul said, "*And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"²⁶

The New Testament church has a standard of truth.

Jesus said, "... I am the way the truth, and the life..."²⁷

We have a standard of truth. God's word both in its written form in the Bible and in its living form in Christ, is truth. Only those who are saved can see and benefit from this truth (1 Corinthians 2:14). No one can be saved apart from truth.

Our daily prayer to God should be that of the Psalmist, "Lead me in thy truth and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day."²⁸

How important is truth within the body of believers? In Acts 4:34 to 5:11 we learn of two members of the early church. They were Ananias and Sapphira, a man and his wife. They lied about the amount of money they received for a piece of land, which they sold. The punishment was immediate death by the hand of God. With regard to the truth the apostle Paul states; "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed".²⁹ Again death, (eternal death in this case), is the consequence for falsehood. Truth is not only important it is of paramount importance. When we deny truth, we deny Christ. We take the glory that belongs to God alone and we give it to the things that God has created. A major reason for being armed with the whole amour of God (Eph. 6:13ff) is that we may be able to guard against falsehood in various forms.

The outcome of "body hermeneutics", as it is presented in the pages of Searching Together and similar sources, is the denial of truth. This can be clearly seen in the writings of Joe Higginbothan and Paul Patton. We examined some of their teaching in the previous section. Here we will look at some of the practical implications as they expound them. We do not have to seek out some half-hidden reference; they are so bold that they glory in falsehood. In the last part of their article "Rank and File Hermeneutics" referenced in the previous section they state "1. Believers must verbally agree with one another that our first loyalty is to Jesus, not to a theological system or an organization. This precludes division over some point of theology. To divide over a point of theology is to make your theology more important then spiritual unity in Jesus."³⁰

Before I comment on this there is an even more disturbing statement that must be quoted. In the next issue of Searching Together there is a Reader Reaction section which contains a letter from Mark Brooks of Valencia, Pa. Mark does a good job of highlighting some of the serious problems raised by what was taught in the "Rank and File Hermeneutics" article. In their reply to this letter Joe and Paul state the following:

²⁵ Isaiah 8:20

²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:15 - 17

²⁷ John 14:6

²⁸ Ps. 25:5

²⁹ Galatians 1:8

³⁰ Winter 84 issue, page 7

Finally this brother seems to operate from a prepositional base that says Christian unity requires doctrinal homogeneity. We do not agree. Christian unity is based, not upon common belief, but upon common relationship in Jesus by faith. It was unity of common relationship in Jesus which kept Whitefield the Calvinist and Wesley the Arminian from killing each other, and made it possible for both of them to work together in the same kingdom.³¹

Much of our Christian life on earth is a balancing act. We are in the world, but not of the world. We use the things of the world, but must not be mastered by them. In a similar way there is a balance between standing for truth and maintaining fellowship with those who disagree with some of our beliefs. The key here is the context in which we are examining this subject, in this case it is the local body of believers. I have had fellowship with a very wide range of Christians from all over the world. I have had the privilege of teaching a local body of believers who were at opposite ends to me theologically, culturally and economically. There was great sadness upon all our hearts when our time of fellowship came to an end due to the blessed times we shared around the word of God. At other times I have been called (as in the present case) to stand against error and break off fellowship. What is the relationship between fellowship and truth? Is one more important than the other?

We need to look first of all at Joe and Paul's remarks. On what basis do we join together for fellowship? Their position is summarized in the following two sentences from the two quotations given above. "To divide over a point of theology is to make your theology more important than spiritual unity in Jesus." "Christian unity is based, not upon common belief, but upon common relationship in Jesus by faith". The clear implication is that Jesus and truth are two separate entities and that fellowship is much more important than truth. On the one hand we have "a point of theology" and "common belief" on the other we have "spiritual unity in Jesus" and "common relationship in Jesus by faith". Joe and Paul separate what we believe from whom we believe in.

The question here is very clear. What place does objective truth play in the matter of fellowship? Ephesians 5:11 states "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them". Without an objective standard of what is right or wrong it is impossible to have true fellowship. How do we know what the "unfruitful works of darkness" are unless we have a clearly defined objective standard of what they are not? In John 18:38 we read that Pilate questioned Jesus and asked Him "What is truth". Jesus Himself stated in John 14:6 that "I am the way, the truth, and the life". Truth and Jesus are in many ways synonymous. John 8:32 says: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free". It is impossible to separate the person and work of Jesus from the facts presented in the Bible about His person and work. In other words, it is impossible to have any relationship with Jesus apart from Truth. We must be able to clearly articulate what we believe and why we believe it. This becomes crucial because the Lord Jesus is not just a person, He is God. Hebrews 1:3 states: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". Whatever we believe about Jesus directly impacts what we believe about God. All these things are inter-related. Our "common relationship" in Jesus is our relationship to God Himself. Unless we can define who and what God is we can have no meaningful relationship. This is one reason why theology is so important.

The word "theology" was mentioned at various times in the quotes given above. The reader may not see the connection between theology and truth and for this reason we must examine this term briefly. Theology is a vast and complex subject. Our concern here is only with how the term is used in the quotes given above. Basically, it is the science of the Christian religion as taught in the Bible and in the history of the Church. It is often divided into different types, Exegetical theology, Biblical theology, Historical theology etc. For our purposes it can be defined as the science of understanding all that there is to know about Gods revealed will. When we speak about "some point of theology" we are speaking about the interpretation of what God has revealed on some particular subject. We are in fact seeking to answer Pilate's question "what is truth" on a particular subject. People differ on points of theology because they disagree on what the truth is as regards particular subjects. I can think of no better example than that which Joe and Paul referred to, Whitefield and Wesley. This example shows the importance of truth and its relationship to fellowship.

Most readers of this article will be familiar with John Wesley. He is often called the founder of the Methodist branch of the Protestant faith. Historically George Whitefield has been ill-treated by historians. Arnold Dallimore has done a great service to us all with His two volume "George Whitefield. The life and times of the great evangelist of the 18th century revival". Dallimore sets the record straight and brings to light many facts that have been overlooked in the past. The history and intricacies of the Whitefield / Wesley debate have been an interest of mine for many years. I would encourage any serious student of the Word to get a copy of Dallimore's work and study it carefully. For our purposes here it is sufficient to relate the following facts. George Whitefield is considered by many to be the greatest

³¹ Searching Together, Spring 85 Vol. 14:1, page 6

preacher since apostolic times. He started what was to become the Methodist Church and was instrumental under God for the conversion of countless numbers of souls. Needless to say, he was not perfect and Dallimore's account of his life documents some serious flaws. For our purposes the most important fact about Whitefield is that he was a Calvinist and that Wesley was an Arminian. Their differences go far beyond this single distinction however. In general Whitefield's view of the very nature of truth and how we come to the knowledge of this truth differed greatly from Wesley's view. Consequently, the way they approached practical and theological matters differed greatly.

Whitefield generally exhibited great humility while Wesley's primary attribute was pride. The following quotation brings this out. It is taken from the end of a chapter titled "Helping Wesley".

*Whitefield's efforts to assist Wesley brought him into criticism among his own people. They felt he ought to have been building a work in keeping with his own doctrinal beliefs, and, besides that, they had never forgiven Wesley for his treatment of Whitefield in having tried to supplant him in 1740. Indeed, what Lady Huntingdon called Wesley's 'pride and cunning' causes some of the people to believe he was not truly converted. Thus, one of them asked Whitefield if he expected to see Wesley in heaven, to which he replied: 'I fear not, for he will be so near the eternal throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get a sight of him!'*³²

As was quoted above, Joe and Paul made the following comment about Whitefield and Wesley. "It was unity of common relationship in Jesus which kept Whitefield the Calvinist and Wesley the Arminian from killing each other, and made it possible for both of them to work together in the same kingdom". I must confess that I am at somewhat of a loss to understand why they made this statement. It is most unusual to speak of eminent Christians wanting to kill one another. In addition, this remark does not do justice to the actual facts. There can be no doubt that even after the events of 1740 Whitefield continued to work with Wesley. In fact, he was instrumental in advancing Wesley's cause to his own detriment as the following quotations show.

*... Whitefield resigned his office of moderator; and openly and repeatedly declared that he would neither found a sect, nor be at the head of one founded by others. His work for life was to be an evangelist at large, - the friend and helper of all Christian denominations, and the enemy of none. ... for the next twenty years, as opportunity permitted, Whitefield rendered to Wesley's Societies and congregations, throughout the kingdom, an amount of valuable service, the results of which cannot now be rightly estimated.*³³

*Having relinquished the leadership of his own movement, Whitefield endeavored to make himself, as he said, 'simply the servant of all'. As we have seen, in helping others he made, not denominational relationship, but evangelical soundness the basis of his collaboration, and although he labored to promote the cause of evangelicalism in the Church of England, he also lent his aid among Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists and very frequently assisted the cause of John Wesley.*³⁴

There are several factors here that need to be examined. First of all, we must note Whitefield's personal humility and calling. He had a unique calling and consequently was uniquely gifted for this task. The whole context here is not one of local fellowships in specific geographical locations. It is in fact quite the opposite. Whitefield was in many respects a modern-day apostle / evangelist as opposed to an elder or pastor of a local congregation. His lifelong ministry was one of constant travel, building up the body of Christ as a whole. His personal humility and zeal enabled him to compromise as much as possible in order to fulfill his specific calling.

What then was his position with regard to truth? Dallimore gives us some indication in the second quote above where he speaks of "evangelical soundness" being the foundation upon which Whitefield labored. Without some basic standard of truth there can be no true fellowship. For example, if the divinity of Christ or His virgin birth is denied there can be no fellowship. How can we determine what basic elements must be in place? Sometimes, as for example a denial of the virgin birth, the answer is obvious. At other times it is not so clear. The mode of Baptism, while of great importance, should not normally impede fellowship on the broad scale of our oneness in Christ. On the practical level of the local Church this becomes an important factor. In other words, if we are speaking about our relationship to the body as a whole the mode of baptism is a secondary issue. If we are speaking about a local church this becomes a very important matter. On what basis is a new member to be added to the fellowship? This is one reason why we have the Baptist denomination. To some extent each set of circumstances will determine what the minimum standard will

³² Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield. The life and times of the great evangelist of the 18th century revival* Vol. 2, (Edinburgh: and Carlisle: 1980), 353

³³ Rev. L. Tyerman, *The life of the Rev. George Whitefield* Vol. 2, (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1890) 246

³⁴ Dallimore, 335

be. The fact of the matter is that what we believe has a direct effect upon the depth and nature of Christian fellowship. Unity for the sheer sake of unity is valueless.

In 1740 Whitefield wrote a letter to his friend Wesley in response to a sermon Wesley wrote against Calvinism. This shows us how important doctrinal truth was to Whitefield. This letter is dated Dec. 24, 1740. The first two paragraphs read as follows:

Reverend and very dear Brother,

God only knows, what unspeakable sorrow of heart I have felt on your account, since I left England last. Whether it be my infirmity or not, I frankly confess, that Jonah could not go with more reluctance against Nineveh, that I now take pen in hand to write against you. Was nature to speak, I had rather die than do it; and yet if I am faithful to God, and to my own and others' souls, I must not stand neuter any longer. I am very apprehensive that our common adversaries will rejoice to see us differing among ourselves. But what can I say? The children of God are in danger of falling into error. Nay, numbers have been misled, whom God has been please to work upon by my ministry, and a greater number are still calling aloud upon me, to shew also my opinion; I must then shew, that I know no man after the flesh, and that I have no respect to persons, and further that is consistent with my duty to my Lord and Master, JESUS CHRIST.

*This letter, no doubt, will lose me many friends: and for this cause, perhaps God has laid this difficult task upon me, even to see whether I am willing to forsake all for him, or not. From such considerations as these, I think it my duty to bear an humble testimony, and earnestly to plead for the truths which, I am convinced, are clearly revealed in the word of God. In the defense whereof I must use great plainness of speech, and treat my dearest friends upon earth with the greatest simplicity, faithfulness and freedom, leaving the consequences of all to God.*³⁵

The actual document is eighteen pages as printed in Dallimore's book. In it Whitefield defends the biblical doctrine of election and opposes various errors that Wesley was propagating.

Clearly the truth, as it is in Jesus, was of paramount importance to Whitefield. All must be sacrificed for this cause.

Near the end of his remarks Whitefield writes as follows:

Dear, dear sir, O be not offended! For Christ's sake be not rash! Give yourself to reading. Study to convenient of grace. Down with your carnal reasoning. Be a little child; and then, instead of pawning your salvation, as you have done in a late hymn book, in the doctrine of universal redemption be not true; instead of talking of sinless perfection, as you have done in the preface to that hymn book, and making man's salvation to depend on his own free-will, as you have in this sermon you will compose an hymn in praise of sovereign distinguishing love. You will caution believers against striving to work a perfection out of their own hearts, and print another sermon the reverse of this, and entitle it free-grace indeed. Free, not because free to all; but free, because God may withhold or give it to whom and when he pleases.

*Till you do this, I must doubt whether or not you know yourself. In the meanwhile, I cannot but blame you of censuring the clergy of our church for not keeping to their articles, when you yourself by your principles, positively deny the 9th, 10th, and 17th.*³⁶

The reference above to "articles" is important. As with the vast majority of denominations the Church of England has laid down in writing what that institution believes constitutes truth. Whitefield is accusing Wesley of breaking three of the 'truths' that he has sworn to uphold. As if that were not bad enough Wesley was accusing others of doing the very thing, he was guilty of. This is another reason why theology is so important. Unless we have established clear guidelines of what we believe constitutes truth how can we tell if someone is denying what we hold to be true? How can we come together to fellowship unless there is some solid basis for that fellowship? Chaos will result unless there is an objective standard of what we hold to be true in place. Obviously only the Bible contains truth in its purest form. Only the Bible is infallible. No human document can or should replace that which is the source of truth as God has revealed it to us. Articles of faith are important but they are not perfect. They do however serve a real and valuable purpose in the constant fight against error and false teaching.

³⁵ Ibid., 552

³⁶ Ibid., 568 - 569

Truth must come first, all else must be sacrificed or we are doomed to failure. In Ephesians 4:1-7 Paul sets forth Christian Unity in all its glory. In Christian Unity **truth is the first thing**, as the following quote from Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's commentary on verse 4 shows.

*The Holy Spirit, as the common higher principle of life (#Eph 2:18,22), gives to the Church its true unity. Outward uniformity is as yet unattainable; but beginning by having one mind, we shall hereafter end by having "one body." The true "body" of Christ (all believers of every age) is already "one," as joined to the one Head. But its unity is as yet not visible, even as the Head is not visible; but it shall appear when He shall appear (#Joh 17:21-23 Col 3:4). Meanwhile the rule is, "In essentials, unity; in doubtful questions, liberty; in all things, charity." There is more real unity where both go to heaven under different names than when with the same name one goes to heaven, the other to hell. Truth is the first thing: those who reach it, will at last reach unity, because truth is one; while those who seek unity as the first thing, may purchase it at the sacrifice of truth, and so of the soul itself.*³⁷

Note in particular the last sentence. If we sacrifice truth, we sacrifice our very salvation. What good is unity without salvation?

I fully agree with their statement that it is not now possible for us to achieve true outward unity. We must do the best we can do and that is to make truth foundational. We must join together on the basis of common belief first, the exact opposite of what the open church advocates teach. As the above quote puts it "In essentials, unity", without some solid foundation we cannot build a lasting structure. Anyone who is willing to play fast and loose with the truth is an enemy with whom we cannot have true fellowship.

The editors of "Searching Together" often quote Ephesians 4:15; sometimes it is printed on the cover. As is often the case they take this verse out of context and use it to suit their own ends. Ephesians 4:11-16 teaches us that truth and unity are intimately connected. We can only achieve true unity when we practice sound doctrine. Maturity comes from putting sound doctrine into practice. If we would follow Christ, we will often have to sacrifice unity over "some point of theology".

2. What is truth?

In the section above I mentioned Joe and Paul's reply to the letter from Mark Brooks of Valencia, Pa. John Zens also replied. In his comments he states:

*I think what Joe & Paul meant by not dividing over 'some point of theology,' was the idea that we shouldn't separate from Christians over non-essential points of systems of theology. For example, when you use the word "truth" in your letter you seem to identify it with your system of theology. You then imply that it is fruitless to assemble with others who disagree with truth - **your system**. ... The crux of the matter is to determine when something is a "gospel issue".*³⁸

Jon raises a valid point. Some matters of doctrine are of vital importance. His term "gospel issue" is not a bad way to refer to this. This subject was examined briefly in the previous section. Unfortunately, his remarks do not address the errors involved in what Joe and Paul had written. My primary concern here is with a deeper issue, which is raised by his remarks. Can we speak about truth without a corresponding system of theology? Zens implies that we must. He says that Mark identifies "truth" with his system of theology. How does Jon Zens approach this matter in his writings? In other words does he practice what he preaches on this subject?

In 1982 he wrote a article titled 'What is a Minster?'. In this article he lists thirteen principles based on many different Bible passages. The last two paragraphs read as follows:

Our church life is far from the N.T. principles we have studied. Certain traditions stand as huge blockades to our obedience to these principles. Brothers and sisters, has the time not come to put aside these traditions that act as hindering weights, and move forward in obedience to our precious Savior?

As I said in "Building Up the Body," "Some might feel that churches are not 'ready' for the truths that have been discussed in this article. But why should truth be postponed? Were churches 'ready' to practice the responsibilities of priesthood a hundred years ago? Fifty? Twenty? If years of tradition are wrong, just when will we be 'ready' to edify

³⁷ Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments Vol. 2, (Hartford: The S. S. Scranton Company, American Ed.) 349

³⁸ Searching Together Spring, 85 page 8 (emphasis his)

one another, as we should? If something important is missing in our churches, then the time has come for us to implement what Christ has revealed. The implications of a functioning priesthood probably seem 'radical' only because we are used to patterns of tradition which have no foundation in Scripture (BRR, Vol. 10, #2, pg 29).³⁹

Notice what he says, "the **truths** that have been discussed" & "why should **truth** be postponed". In other words, the systematic interpretation of the Bible passages he has expounded equals truth. Put as simply as possible his system equals truth. This "truth" is so vital that we must take strong measures to implement it even if this means departing from traditional systems of truth. Using the "truth in this way is exactly what he criticized Mark for.

The fact of the matter is that we can only understand and reference truth as part of a larger system. Every single truth has a direct relationship to other truths. There is a unique and deliberate pattern to the truths of the Bible. If we deny or misrepresent one, we cannot avoid the impact this will have on many others.

What then is truth? Clearly it must be something more than what Jon Zens would have us believe. He expounds various passages and comes up with an idea that seems to hang together. On this basis we are to reject what he calls "tradition" and embark upon a radical new approach. What if twenty or fifty or even thousands of people said the same things he is saying, would that make it true? Clearly in and of its self it would not. Truth is not some abstract belief; it is a person, or more correctly a personal being, God. Truth is true because it is intrinsically so, not because we think it is. God's intended meaning in any given passage of scripture is truth. The closer we come to this meaning the closer we come to truth. The more clearly, we see Jesus as He really is the nearer, we will be to truth.

Grated no "system of theology" is perfect. No single group or person has a complete understanding of truth. Our systems are imperfect just as we ourselves are. God has, however, promised to lead us into all truth. The Bible is full of promises about our being able to know the truth. God has not been negligent since the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has in fact given to His Church many gifted people who have shed much light on the truths of the Bible. There is a reason why Jon Zen's teaching on the subject of the local church seems radical. For the most part they are completely unscriptural. You can force scripture to fit a preconceived idea, but that does not make it true. I say for the most part, because Jon has been used of God in the past to shed new light upon some areas of truth as it is revealed in the Bible. There is still a great deal of room for growth and for a clearer understanding of these truths. We must however exercise great caution.

One reason why we do not have a clear understanding of truth is because we fail to use the truth we already have. Most American Christians believe in the supremacy of man. Their battle cry is the freedom of man's will. God can only save when we are willing is one foundational "truth" that most believe in. Jon Zens does not believe this yet along with many others in the open church movement he is desperate to discover some 'new truth' in order to justify his current ministry. Both are equally wrong. Until we give God His rightful place and allow the Bible to speak for its self, truth will for the most part allude us. When we take up our cross to bear it, trusting and obeying we will certainly come to a clearer knowledge of what the truth is. Do you really want to know what is truth is? First of all, it is costly, in terms of effort, time, discipline and even money. We must study to show ourselves approved. We must humble ourselves and become as little children asking for wisdom and admitting that we know nothing.

Obtain a copy of one of the great commentaries on the Bible, John Gill's, Matthew Henry's and John Calvin's are perhaps three of the best. Obtain sound linguistic tools like those quoted in this essay. Devote yourself to prayer on this subject. Obey what truth you already have. Study the book of Romans, by putting aside your preconceived ideas. John Piper and R.C. Sproul are two excellent modern authors who are worth reading. John Piper is a Baptist while R.C. Sproul is a Presbyterian. After years of study I am convinced that the Bible teaches only believers' baptism. In spite of his opposing views on this subject, R.C. Sproul is well worth reading. Most of all let the Bible speak for itself. Don't force meaning into passages, compare one passage with many others. Above all make the glory of God your primary concern. Any doctrine that exalts man at God's expense is suspect. Likewise, any teaching that waters down the importance of biblical truth should be avoided at all cost. Make the Bible your primary source of food to feed your soul. Other books as I have just stated are of great value, yet the Bible alone contains pure truth.

Be especially careful of anything "radical", which does not have a sound foundation in scripture. Orthodoxy, in and of its self, does not guarantee truthfulness, but it is a good start. I may need to differ from John Gill, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards or any of the other great saints the Lord has given to us in history, but I should only disagree when the Bible is completely on my side. In the same way finding one or two authors who agree with your position is no guarantee of correctness either. Jon Zens has not demonstrated the truthfulness of his open church position, therefore beware of his teaching on this subject.

³⁹ Searching Together Autumn, 1982 Vol. 2:3, page 21

Elders / Deacons the "Leadership" factor.

1. What the open church advocates teach about leadership in the body of Christ.

Jon Zens in an article titled "Building up the Body - One Man or One Another", gives us a starting point to examine this subject. This quote is in harmony with others that advocate either minimizing or removing formal leadership from within the Body of Christ. It can be found under the section "The New Testament Perspective: Priority of the Body". As is shown below the first paragraph is from an IVP book.

The New Testament simply does not speak in terms of two classes of Christians -- "minister" and "laymen" -- as we do today. According to the Bible, the people (laos, "laity") of God comprise all Christians, and all Christians through the exercise of spiritual gifts have some "work of ministry." So, if we wish to be biblical, we will have to say that all Christians are laymen (God's people) and all are ministers. The clergy-laity dichotomy is unbiblical and therefore invalid. It grew up as an accident of church history and actually marked a drift away from biblical faithfulness.... It is one of the principal obstacles to the Church effectively being God's agent of the Kingdom today because it creates the false idea that only "holy men," namely, ordained ministers, are really qualified and responsible for leadership and significant ministry (The Community of the King [IVP, 1977], pp.94-95).

*The N.T., indeed, makes a distinction between leaders and people (cf. 1 Thess.5:12-13). But this distinction assumes the priesthood of believers, and does not swallow it up as the "clergy/laity" practice has in the past.*⁴⁰

Jon Zens realized that the quote from "The Community of the King" needs some qualification. The quote does have the single qualification of "as we do today". This is however clearly insufficient as the impression given, is that the Bible knows nothing of leaders at all. Jon correctly notes that the Bible does make this important division, but then he qualifies it with a great big "but". It is a known fact that you can say whatever you like on the left side of a but, it is what is on the right side that carries the weight of the sentence. Jon tries to adhere to what the Bible teaches on the subject of elders throughout the "Building up the Body" article yet it is clear that he wants to add something new. A second example of how he treats this subject would not be out of place. When speaking about 1 Corinthians 14 he makes the following remarks:

*I am not suggesting in all of this that the elders do not teach in the church gatherings, or, conversely, that all must speak. Obviously, the teaching of the elders is to give backbone and guidance to the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim.3:2). But it is clear that speaking words of edification in the local church is not limited to one "minister."*⁴¹

Again, we see the little word 'but'. He wants to "have it both ways" as it were, yes elders are important, but there is something that is much more important. It is a most interesting that many of the quotes he gives from other people are much less biblical than his own teaching. This is an important fact that should not be ignored. Anyone who agrees with the point he is trying to make is pressed in service.

One issue of Searching Together was devoted to a highly edited version of W. Carl Ketcherside's "The Royal Priesthood".⁴²

The Searching Together article, which is 12 pages in length, gives no reference about where the complete work can be found or anything else about it. It was in fact edited from the complete document, which runs to 85 pages as printed from the Internet on my printer. Many of those who might agree with some or the entire Searching Together version might take a different view after reading the unabridged version. This is important for several reasons. 1. Jon Zens **appears** to be deliberately biasing the article to favor his own purpose. 2. We simply cannot evaluate the article unless we know more about it. 3. It bears upon the question of what scriptural proofs there are for the doctrine that Mr. Ketcherside and others propose. For these reasons we will examine some parts of this article, from both the edited Searching Together version and from the complete Internet version.⁴³

⁴⁰ Baptist Reformation Review (this is the old name for Searching Together, the name was changed in 1982), Vol. 10:2, 1981, pages 11,12

⁴¹ Ibid., 14

⁴² For those who are interested the web page address for this paper is as follows:

www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wketcherside/royal

⁴³ Please refer to the section below on the "Priesthood of All Believers" for more information on this subject.

Chapter one of 'The Royal Priesthood', is divided into three short sections. Section two is the "Plan of the Book". In this section Mr. Ketcherside explains that the book is divided into two parts. He says that the first section is a study of what the Bible reveals about the priesthood. It is obvious that to him the Old Testament priesthood is intimately connected with what he calls the "priesthood of all believes" today. The second section deals with the arguments for a special priesthood. By this he means the current practice of setting aside certain men to act as "priests" who represent the rest of the people. This includes any type of office, the pastor, minister, bishop, evangelist, preacher or Roman Catholic priest. It matters not if the person is saved or unsaved, Roman Catholic, or Baptist, the fact that one person is set aside is all that matters. On this basis he teaches that God is disobeyed and his work hindered. This fact is strongly borne out by the whole second part of this book. He uses the Roman Catholic Church and its priests as the 'gold standard' by which to judge the whole system of setting aside true leaders in the Church. Any true Christian who has even the simplest understanding of Church history and doctrine will see a major problem here. First of all, the context of the book is supposed to be about church life and ministry in the true church of God. It is within the body of true believers and here alone that we should be concerned with. That is not to say there are no true Christians in the Roman Catholic Church. It is a fact that some of the greatest leaders and thinkers have come from this institution. Even today there are individuals who truly belong to Christ yet for different reasons remain part of the Roman Catholic Church. As an institution, however, it has opposed the true Church through most of its history. Again, as an institution it has been widely regarded by the Protestant Church as the antichrist. To attack this pagan organization and then apply what you get from this directly to the true Church of God is frankly absurd. The only correct method, which we will examine in detail later, is to study the Bible and especially the New Testament in detail on this subject. If the Bible teaches that certain men were set apart as "shepherds of the sheep" then on what basis do we deny this? Surly not on the basis of anything that the Roman Catholic Church does or does not do.

This is important because in the Searching Together abridged version there is only one reference to the Roman Catholic Church. It reads, in part as follows:

The Roman Catholic Church has built up a system of special priesthood on a hierarchical basis, [and in approximation to this the Protestant world generally has adopted a clergy system which.... ⁴⁴

The unabridged version reads as follows:

The Roman Catholic Church has built up a system of special priesthood on a hierarchical basis, the grounds for which we will examine in subsequent chapters. In approximation to this the Protestant world generally has espoused a clergy system which negates the New Covenant ideal of universal priesthood ⁴⁵

In fact Mr. Zens has cut and pasted to an amazing extent. What motive(s) could there be for this? One possible motive is to keep the reader ignorant of the true basis of this work by Mr. Ketcherside. Is the biblical "proof" for what Mr. Ketchersides believes so poor that he must find proof in the faults of an ungodly institution?

In Chapter 11 of the Royal Priesthood Mr. Ketcherside states the following:

Just as any attempt to create a special clergy must result in a laity, so any attempt to create the idea of a distinctive laity must result in the creation of a special clergy. You may designate the clergy by whatever terms you wish, borrowing the language of the apostate church, or "stealing the livery of heaven" in which to clothe them, but so long as the idea of a special ministerial caste exists, and the remainder of the saints are recognized as "the laity" that long you are nearer to Rome than to Jerusalem. It matters not if you call the clergyman "our minister," "local evangelist," or just plain "preacher." If he occupies a place of prominence in the assembly of the saints as the exclusive minister to "declare the wonderful works of God" when the whole church comes together in one place, and other saints are excluded from the opportunity by virtue of his very presence, you have a special clergy. A preacher can be a clergyman as easily as a clergyman can be a preacher. ⁴⁶

Here we find another example of "having it both ways". If we took only the first half of the above quote he is stating quite clearly that the Christian Church must be a one-class system. There can be no division all are 'ministers' all are 'laity'. Yet in the second half of his statement he seems to be saying something different. This starts with the words "If he occupies". To say the least this is a very artificial definition of what makes a man's ministry unbiblical. Either

⁴⁴ Searching Together, Winter 1999, Volume 27:4, page 11

⁴⁵ This is the first sentence of chapter 12 Priesthood and Ministry. From www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wketcherside/royal

⁴⁶ Ibid.

there are true leaders as opposed to followers or there aren't. You can try and make a leader so similar to the followers or followers so similar to leaders if you choose, but there soon comes a point where this leads to utter foolishness.

There is indeed much that is wrong with Church government and practice today. There is a real need to examine the way leadership is given and practiced in the Body. Yet it will serve only Satan if we toss out both the good and the bad together. Is the current practice of having one or two leaders (commonly the pastor and sometimes a co-pastor) leading a service unbiblical? Do we have to have mass-participation of a specific type?

Before we examine this subject further something must be clarified. There is much that is good in the open church teaching. They have a valid point that all members have gifts and room must be given to the exercise of these gifts. It is not biblical for one or two men to literally "do it all". The problem is that this becomes so important to some people that they become unbalanced and wrongly divide the word of truth. We must not go to the other extreme of having unqualified men in positions of leadership. Paul laid down very specific instructions on who is qualified to be an elder. Nevertheless, there is a real need in the Church today for more openness and sharing by the whole body of believers. Only men and among these only those who meet the stringent guidelines are acceptable. This present work is **not** a blanket defense of the current practices of the Protestant churches today. That which is good should be taken out of the 'Open Church' movement and applied to our church life today.

An Example of that which is good can be found in Jon's article "Building up the Body". Under section 1 of "The New Testament Perspective" he examines Ephesians 4: 12. He makes a valid point that "the function of the pastors-teachers is to equip the saints so that they can minister".⁴⁷ This verse is often miss-applied by many in the established church.

At the center of the area of controversy are what Jon Zens and others call the "clergy / laity" distinction. This can be clearly seen in the quotes given above. Jon devoted a whole issue of "Searching Together" to this subject. The following quote gives a good idea of how he views the clergy / laity division.

Because the New Testament knows nothing of "clergy" the fact that a separate caste of the "ordained" permeates our vocabulary and practice illustrates rather forcefully that we do not yet take the NT very seriously. The "clergy" practice is a heresy that must be renounced. It strikes at the heart of the priesthood of all believers that Jesus purchased on the cross. It contradicts the shape Jesus' kingdom was to take when He said, "You are all brethren." Since it is a tradition of men it nullifies the Word of God (Mark 7:13)⁴⁸

It's hard to imagine more forceful words but is there truth and substance in them? It is very easy to set up a false target and then shoot it full of holes. The real question is not whether we call a person a clergyman, pastor, minister, elder, bishop or even priest. Nor is the real question how and when he may minister. The real question is this: Should there be real leaders in the true church of God, men and in special cases women who are set apart from the rest of the believers? When I say "set apart" I do not mean that they are not part of the body. They are set apart in the sense of having specific duties that others do not have. Do these people have real authority and freedom from God to fulfill their ministry as God pleases? In other words, are there two basic groups of Christians, leaders and followers or are all leaders? Qualify it as they will, those who advocate the removal of the minister / laymen distinction are unbiblical in this regard.

Much of the confusion and false teaching centers around the practice of equating the "pastor" with the Old Testament priest. This is what Jon Zens does in the last quote given above. His whole point is that all believers are priests not just certain people. As we shall see this whole concept is wrong. The 1992 issue of Searching Together contains a review article by Jon Zens titled "Priesthood, Eucharist, & Ordination". In this article he quotes various passages from the book "New Testament Theology in Dialogue". This was written by two authors, John Mackey (a Catholic) and James D.G. Dunn (a Protestant). Even though he clearly states this fact he refers only to Dunn in the rest of his review. It should be noted the Jon Zens regards this work as a justification of his views on this subject and that he holds Dunn in high regard. Under the heading of Priesthood, Jon Zens gives the flowing paragraph. The page references are to Mackey and Dunn's book.

A distinctive of the N.T., asserts Dunn, "is the complete absence from its pages of a distinction between 'priest' and 'laity', of the thought that some Christians may or must needs exercise a priesthood which is not the prerogative of others" (p.122). This N.T. viewpoint, he notes, "marks it off from both the Old Testament and from what was subsequently to become the pattern of Catholic Christianity (p. 122). Compared to the Jewish and Greco-Roman

⁴⁷ Vol. 10:2 page 13

⁴⁸ Searching Together, Winter 1995 Vol. 23:4, page 8

religions surrounding them, "the first Christian congregations were an oddity indeed - religious groups without priest or sacrifice" (p. 123)⁴⁹

There are two things that must be noted about this quote. First of all, he is stating that all Christians must have the same prerogatives, all must be equal. Secondly, he states that the New Testament church was without a priest or sacrifice. Was the New Testament Church without a priest or sacrifice? Think about this for a moment before you read the next sentence. What are two of the most fundamental truths taught in the Bible? What is the purpose of the book of Hebrews? Christ is both our high priest and sacrifice. We have only this one sentence from page 123, which makes it hard to determine Dunn's meaning. It is true that there are no more literal sacrifices to be offered as Christ died once for all (Hebrews 10:10). Yet it is by his shed blood and ministry as high priest, (Hebrews 8:1,2), that we have salvation.

The second question is, are all believers equal; do all have the same prerogatives? I find the concept of marriage very helpful in this regard.

Marriage is often used in the Bible as a type of our union with Christ. While we cannot examine this subject in any detail now it holds some important clues for understanding our present discussion. Three persons are involved in any marriage, God, the husband and the wife. God is over the husband and the husband is over the wife. The husband is to love his wife as himself while the wife is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord. The husband and wife under God make up one whole unit, yet the wife occupies a separate place in submission to her husband. Under God the pastor(s) of a local church have a place of authority over the rest of the body. In love to Christ and following His example they lead by serving, giving themselves for the body of Christ just as the husband does for his wife. The outcome of this labor should be the building up of the body so that it can develop fully and exercise all of its gifts just as a well-developed human body can exercise its functions. If the elder or elders are functioning correctly their will be the periodic "birth" of new elders from within the body of the believers. These in turn would build up other churches.

As the example of marriage shows all believers are not equal in regard to the status, abilities and duties.

Other examples abound. Do we find uniformity in the work place? In other words, are all people nurses? Are all computer programs or construction workers? Of course not! Do all earn the same wage? The questions could go on forever and clearly the answer is that God has ordained diversity not uniformity in this world. Look at the animal kingdom, at the plants some are large some are small, everywhere we find the same lesson. We are not meant to have the same functions within the body. If we did there would be no body, because one part could not be distinguished from another.

This is a good time to briefly touch upon a controversial subject that has some bearing on this present topic. What is the role of women in the Church? Can they occupy positions of authority over men in the public assembly of believers? In a 1981 edition of *Searching Together* (then the B.R.R.) Jon Zens wrote an article on this subject. It is titled "Aspects of Female Priesthood: A focus on 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor. 14:34-35". Aside from some of the remarks about priesthood I found this to be a good thought-provoking article. I would recommend it to anyone interested in this subject. At one-point Jon takes up the subject of subordination vs. inferiority. I feel that this has great practical relevance to leaders (ministers or pastors) vs. other believers. When speaking about 1 Cor. 11:3 Jon states:

In v. 3 Paul gives the doctrinal basis for confronting the women with their misdirected practice. "Freedom" in Christ does not negate the basic authority structure God has set up in history. Male/female equality in Christ (Gal. 3:28) does not cancel out male headship/female subordination in creation.

Many, unfortunately, have made the mistake of equating subordination with inferiority, But the example of God as the "head" of Christ immediately dispels this misconception. The three Persons of the Trinity are absolutely equal. Yet in working out redemption in history Christ subjected Himself to the Father. The Son's subordination ... did not in any way imply the Son's inferiority ... Thus for wives to submit to their husbands according to the creation order does not mean that they are inferior to men.⁵⁰

In a similar way the fact that God has provided true leaders for his body, the Church, does not mean the other members are inferior or useless. Each has a part to play. We will examine this in more detail in the section dealing with the priesthood of all believers.

⁴⁹ *Searching Together*, 1992 Vol. 20:1,2,3, Page 18

⁵⁰ B.B.R. 1981, Vol. 10:3, Pages 4-5

2. What the Bible teaches

Does the Bible teach that there were two basic types of Christians in the early church? In other words, do we find "clergy" and "laity" as two distinct groups of people? The terms "clergy" and "laity" here mean simply two groups of people that can be distinguished from each other. We will look at this in more detail later. For now, all we want to do is to answer this basic question.

A key passage here is Isaiah 66:21 ("I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD).

The great Bible expositor John Gill goes straight to the heart of the matter in his commentary on this passage:

*That is, of the Gentiles, the brethren brought as an offering to the Lord; and therefore must respect Gospel times, when the Aaronic priesthood would be changed and cease, which admitted not of Gentiles, nor any of any other tribe in Israel, but the tribe of Levi; nor is this to be understood of the spiritual priesthood common to all believers, #1Pe 2:5,9 Re 1:6 5:10 since of those converted Gentiles brought, not all, but only some of them, would be taken for priests; and therefore can only be interpreted of the ministers of the word, who, in Old Testament language, are called priests, though never in the New Testament; but elders, bishops, overseers, pastors, and teachers. The first preachers of the Gospel were Jews, as the twelve apostles, the seventy disciples, Paul and Barnabas, and others; but when the Gospel was preached, and churches planted in the Gentile world, then priests, or pastors, or elders, were taken out from among them, and ordained over the churches everywhere; and which have continued, more or less, ever since; and will be more abundant in the latter day; whose work and office is not to offer up slain beasts, as the priests of old; but to point to the sacrifice of Christ, to the Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of men; and to teach the knowledge of crucified Christ, and the several doctrines and duties of the Christian religion, as the priests formerly taught the knowledge of the law, #Mal 2:7: and for Levites, saith the Lord; this still more clearly shows that the prophecy belongs to the Gospel dispensation, and is to be understood figuratively and spiritually; for none but those of the tribe of Levi could be taken for Levites in a literal sense; but here Gentiles are said to be taken for such, and design men in Gospel churches. The Levites, as their name signifies, were such as were "joined" to others; they ministered to the priests, and assisted them, and had the charge of the temple, and the vessels of it, to whom deacons now answer; who are helps and assistants to the ministers of the word: their business is to serve tables, and to take care of the secular affairs of the church; so that this is a prophecy of the churches in the latter day being truly organized, and filled with proper officers, as well as with numerous members.*⁵¹

Here we have an Old Testament prophecy predicting the day when leaders will be chosen from among vast numbers of Gentile converts. These leaders will have duties and privileges that are quite different from the old covenant types the main purpose of which is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. They fall into two different types: priests i.e. elders and Levites i.e. deacons.

What then do we find in this new dispensation, the New Testament?

1 Peter 5:1-4.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Peter also contains two of the favorite passages for those who wish to play up the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The four passages from chapter 5 are full of instruction on this important subject. Peter who is an elder, (as well as an apostle) is speaking specially to certain members of the body of Christ who he calls "the elders" telling them to "shepherd the flock of God". Shepherd is from the Greek word *poimaino*.⁵² It can have the meaning of 'to feed' or to 'nourish' but the meaning here is 'to rule' or 'to govern'.⁵³ The shepherds were in close contact with the sheep. Just as the shepherd must sleep beside the sheep and be aware of all their needs and dangers so the elder or elders must be in close contact with those who they care for. See the comments under Act 20:25 below for more on

⁵¹ John Gill, Gill's Commentary Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House 1980) 1049 (Emphasis mine)

⁵² Strong's number 4165

⁵³ Unless other wise noted word meanings were summarized from a variety of standard sources.

this subject. He gives very specific instructions on how this is to be done, such instructions would never have been needed if the office of elder was not a very powerful one. He then refers to "the Chief Shepherd". All agree that the Chief Shepherd is Jesus Christ (see John 10:11, Hebrews 13:20). It is from Christ who is the head of the church, His body, that the under shepherds derive their authority (John 21:16). The important point for us is the fact that in the early church we had two groups or types of people who could be instantly recognized as being separate distinct entities. They are the shepherds (elders) and the sheep. Just as real sheep would come to harm or even death without their shepherd so the "laity", though gifted in one or more ways by the Holy Spirit, are still in just as much need of a leader as sheep are of a shepherd.

Acts 13:1-4

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Here at Antioch the believers were first called Christians. (Acts 11:26) We know with certainty that there was a well-established local body of believers here. Do we read that all the believers exercising their gifts in a communal meeting came to some collective conclusion? No, we do not. Instead we learn that there were true leaders, recognized by both God and, by clear inference, the body of believers as such. These are called prophets and teachers most likely this was one office the "prophets" part indicating their divine authority and the "teacher" part the means by which they ministered. It could also mean two separate offices, but either way for our purposes these men were clearly demarcated. At this place there was a functioning body of believers and among those believers and differentiated from them were certain men who were set apart from the rest. It should be noted that some versions of the Bible read "as Barnabas", which might give the impression that only these men are mentioned but others were there as well. The Greek word here is Strong's number 5037 'te' which has the meaning both or not only, but also. Clearly then these men and these alone are the focus here.

These five men were "ministering" to the Lord. They were exercising the God given gifts for which they were set apart from the rest of the believers. The inference is that they were involved in public worship as those who officiated. Look at the detail we are given about these men, how exact the Holy Spirit is here, these specific men whom I know by name. Not only so but Barnabas and Saul are set apart and given to "the work to which I have called them".

Here we find the "local Church" in action and it is nothing like what the "Open Church" advocates would have us believe.

Acts 15: 1 - 7, 12,13 22,23

And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren. And when they arrived at Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses." And the apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter. And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ... And all the multitude kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.... Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas--Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren, and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.

There are a lot of references in the above section of Acts to individuals and to groups of people. We will examine whom the reference is to in each case. Verse 1 "the brethren" Most likely all the believers in this location. Verse 2 "Paul and Barnabas" Note that two of the leaders and as far as we are told they alone debated with those who were teaching falsehood. "the brethren" again most likely all the believers. "to the apostles and elders" While in one sense it

is quite true that they were going to the whole body of the believers the emphasis is on the leaders of that body as distinct from the body. The elders in all of these passages are local leaders, men who had been chosen and set apart as such. Verse 3 "the church" again the whole church. "all the brethren" as before every believer. Verse 4 Here we find three distinct groups "the church", "the apostles" and "the elders". The apostles here and else were representing the Church at large while the elders represented the local church. "The church" represents all the believers. Verse 6 "the apostles and the elders" As is clear from verses 12, 22 and 23 the whole body of believers was most likely present. Yet it was the leaders who were directly involved which is evident by the language of the Holy Spirit here. Verse 7 "Brethren" certainly the apostles and elders but including everyone else. Verses 12 and 13 As the context makes clear it was the apostles and elders who were the primary actors while at the same time the whole body of believers was present. Verse 22 Again three separate groups "the apostles and the elders, with the whole church" "leading men among the brethren" in other words shepherds as opposed to sheep. Verse 23 "The apostles and the brethren who are elders" This is again most instructive. This letter was sent specifically from the leaders among the brethren and not from the brethren as a whole even though all agreed that it should be sent.

What do we learn from the brief study above? For one thing we see leadership in action, leaders taking the lead and other following. There is real interaction here between the body of believers and their leaders. All were involved, but the Holy Spirit has left no question as to where the authority and primary responsibility belonged. The fact that all were involved is very important though. Christian leadership is not dictatorial. There is clearly a strong degree to which the whole body, leaders and followers have authority and responsibility. Both aspects are present here, but the emphasis is on the leaders. Much more could be said but the important things are clear. There were in this case three groups of people acting together, leaders from the global church, leaders from the local church and the members of the local church. This was no big free for all where everyone had to have their say. The leaders debated and decided on a course of action and the body of believers put their seal of approval and agreement to what had been decided.

Acts 20: 17, 28-30

And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.... "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

We learn much about leadership in the body here as well as one important reason why leaders are needed. In addition, we see an inherent danger in letting "everyone" speak in the general assembly of the church.

From the context of these verses we know that the apostle Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to be bound and taken captive. This would in effect greatly limit the type of ministry he could perform from that time on. He had a great desire to stop and visit the body of believers at Ephesus and possibly those in the surrounding area. The urgency of his mission in Jerusalem is so great that he could not pay a personal visit so he summons the leaders of the local church at Ephesus to him. There follows from verses 18 - 27 an account of Paul's ministry both past and future. He then turns his attention to those under his care. He has concern both for the elders and for those under their care. A key word here is that which is translated "among". It is Strong's number 1722 'en' which is a preposition with the meaning of in or with. Among is an excellent rendering here as it brings out the fact that the elders were a part of the fellowship and not separate from it. We see throughout the book of Acts and in other New Testament books a hierarchy of leadership that goes beyond local and even geographical boundaries. This should not be ignored, but the clear teaching of scripture is that the elders of a local church form an intimate unit with that body.

We learn from Acts 20 that the elders are overseers by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made the office in the first place and then subsequently chooses who will fill this position. The word translated "overseers" is Strong's number 1985 "episkopos" In the AV it is translated bishop six times and as overseer once. Episkopos in this verse means a superintendent, head or overseer of a local body of believers. This word has the same meaning in Phil. 1: 1, Tim. 3: 2, and Tit. 1: 7. The purpose of the overseer is to "shepherd" the church of God, in this case the local assembly. Refer to the section above on 1 Peter 5 for the meaning of this word. See how precious the flock is, it was bought with the very blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. No effort or sacrifice is too great for those entrusted with the task of caring for such sheep as these.

There is a real danger to the flock, because not all that appear to be sheep are sheep. Some indeed are wolves whose only desire is to kill and hurt those under the care of the shepherd. In other words, one of the main dangers to the body of Christ comes from within the body its self. We must have able men, trained in some fashion, with time and energy to spend on the deep things of God. Not all are called to this office that is not to say that they alone have a

calling. All believes have gifts and abilities given to them by God. But certain members of the body are charged with this special task one aspect of which is to guard against heresy. Notice what the wolf does: He teaches falsehood. There are different ways in which this could be done, one such way would be to cause confusion and to simply weaken the time of fellowship that believers have together. There is a real danger with the 'all have to be able to speak' doctrine. It opens the door to those not gifted or qualified to lead. Time should be set aside for more participation when this is appropriate. However, this must be done under strict supervision. Each body of believers is different and in different circumstances. For some this may be a great idea, but for others it may not. To simply 'decree' that this is what everyone had to do all the time is completely unbiblical.

1 Timothy 5:17 - 20

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning.

1 Corinthians 9:6 -10

Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard, and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

We learn something very important about money in these passages. The comments from the Jamieson, Fausset and Brown commentary on 1 Timothy 5:17 summarizes this. They say:

The transition from the widow presbyteresses (#1Ti 5:9) to the presbyters here, is natural. Rule well --literally, "preside well," with wisdom, ability, and loving faithfulness, over the flock assigned to them. Be counted worthy of double honour --that is, the honor which is expressed by gifts (#1Ti 5:3,18) and otherwise. If a presbyter as such, in virtue of his office, is already worthy of honor, he who rules well is doubly so [WIESINGER] (#1Co 9:14 Ga 6:6 1Th 5:12). Not literally that a presbyter who rules well should get double the salary of one who does not rule well [ALFORD], or of a presbyteress widow, or of the deacons [CHRYSOSTOM]. "Double" is used for large in general (#Re 18:6). Specially they who labour in the word and Doctrine--greek, "teaching"; preaching of the word, and instruction, catechetical or otherwise. This implies that of the ruling presbyters there were two kinds, those who labored in the word and teaching, and those who did not. Lay presbyters, so called merely because of their age, have no place here; for both classes mentioned here alike are ruling presbyters. A college of presbyters is implied as existing in each large congregation. As in #1Ti 3:1-16 their qualifications are spoken of, so here the acknowledgments due to them for their services.⁵⁴

It was the duty of the ruling elders to preach and to teach. What clearer guidance do we need? The early church, in much the same way we have today, had paid teachers and preachers. Men who set aside all or much of their time to teach and preach so that they might excel in this particular work. These men, when they did their work properly, deserved recognition and one of the main ways was to receive adequate payment. This is an area that the "open church" advocates love to attack. I am not quite sure how they get around these and similar passages unless they ignore them altogether. Jon Zens in his "The 'Clergy/Laity' Distinction" article noted above treats this subject in the following way.

The pulpit monologue precludes dialogue. The pulpit can only be occupied by certain people - the "clergy". The rest - the "laity" - sit in pews. In this dichotomy you have the essence of our religion - Catholic, Protestant, or otherwise - in a nutshell: the "clergy" are paid to give and the "laymen" pay in order to receive. This distinction permeates our religious vocabulary, and unfortunately captures the heart of our practice: we pay the "clergy" to do the necessary religious activities.⁵⁵

Latter in the article he states:

⁵⁴ (Jamieson, 416)

⁵⁵ Winter 1995, Vol. 23:4, page 6

*Your financial support as a clergy person is admittedly a difficult issue, but needs to be creatively evaluated. The traditional view that it is necessary to pay the "clergy" to preach, visit parishioners, do various administrative duties, etc., is without New Testament foundation. As long as "clergy" are paid to do religious duties why should the body develop its "one-another" ministries?*⁵⁶

This teaching is in direct contradiction to the passages under consideration.

Because of their importance and position within the body the elders were to receive special treatment if they fell into sin. They were in fact not less guilty, but if anything, more guilty if the accusation was proven to be true. Due to their position and responsibilities great care had to be taken to verify the actual facts.

I Timothy 3:1-13

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fell into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise, must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

In this passage Paul speaks about two types of officers in the body of Christ, the "office of a bishop" and "the office of deacon". There is much that is implied in this including the fact that the early church had a well-established system of church government. It is ridiculous to equate either office to the ministry that every believer is to practice. Matthew Poole in his commentary on verse one brings this out.

A faithful saying, that which none can dispute, of which none ought to doubt. If a man desires any office, of which belongs an oversight of the church of God. The Greek word episkope signifies in the general any oversight of other; here the following discourse restrains it to an oversight of persons and affairs in the church. The apostle by this phrase determines this employment lawful, and under due circumstances to be desired, and faith of it, that he who desireth it, desireth a good work, a noble employment, it is a work; the office of the ministry in the church is and ought to be a work. The titles of gospel ministers are not mere titles of honor, and of all works or employment's, the ministry is the most noble employment. We (saith the apostle) are 'stewards of the mysteries of God, ministers of Christ,' 1 Cor. iv. 1. 'ambassadors for Christ, in Christ's stead,' 2 Cor. v. 20. God's 'angles' or 'messengers,' to churches, Rev. ii. 1. It being so good, so great and noble an employment, it is no wonder that God hath restrained women the 'weaker' and more ignoble sex from invading it, for all men are not fit for it, but only such as are hereafter described.⁵⁷

Some may take offence at the last sentence quoted above. Whatever our beliefs are on the subject of women in roles of leadership he raises a valid point "all men are not fit for it". The Bible knows nothing of all believers being equal **in the sense of** all having the same skill sets and functions. Believers are equal in other ways but that is not our present subject. The present-day body of believers would do well to return to the instruction given here. It is not just a matter of what University or Bible College we have graduated from. In fact, this is of very little importance. We may have all the degrees obtainable and still are unable to teach let alone have all the other qualities noted here. Teaching is an important part of what is required of the bishop. 2 Timothy 2:15 brings this out "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" The command is to teach the truth correctly which implies that it is all too easy to teach it incorrectly. That which makes a true teacher and preacher is not the man-made degree, but the Spirit's commission and equipping. It is very useful and even desirable to have some type of formal education but it is wrong to make this an absolute prerequisite.

Titus 1:5

⁵⁶ Ibid. 12

⁵⁷ Matthew Poole, Annotations Upon the Holy Bible Vol. 4, Edinburgh: Thomas and John Turnbull for J. White and Co. 1801), 687

"For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:"

According to the New Testament it is not fitting for a local congregation to be without true leadership. The Greek word for "the things that are wanting" is *leipo*.⁵⁸ It has the meaning of to be wanting or absent or to fail. Churches without real leaders are lacking something vital.

Romans 15:14 & 15 ads further information.

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another. But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Here we have a body of believers located in Rome. As was noted in some of the passages above this would include local leaders. Paul has some very positive things to say about them. They are full of goodness, experts in the knowledge of God and able to encourage one another to do what is correct. This is praise indeed, and shows the high-water mark to which all churches should strive to attain. Yet even this advanced body of believers needed expert leadership. Paul felt the need to write to them in a strong fashion on certain issues. His defense of this is most informative. In his defense he calls himself a "minister" of Christ Jesus. The Greek word here is *leitourgos*.⁵⁹ It is used five times in the A.V. four as minister and once as he that ministers. In this verse it has the meaning "of a priest" as the context and "The New Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon shows."⁶⁰

John Gill in his commentary on this part of Romans 15:16 states:

*The office of apostleship is here amplified and enlarged on, and the ends shown for which that grace was given to him, that he should be a minister; not in holy things about the temple, as the priests and Levites were; or a teacher of the law, some were fond of; but a minister of Christ, one that was made so by him, was qualified and sent forth to minister in his name to men; and who was a preacher of him;*⁶¹

Robert Haldane when commenting on the same words says:

*The grace of the apostleship was given to Paul in order to his being a minister of Christ to the Gentiles . . . The original word for ministry signifies to labor in a sacred office. Our term ministry sufficiently represents it.*⁶²

If every believer, at the time Paul was writing, were 'ministers' then Paul's statement here would have no meaning. Clearly Paul and other specific individuals were ministers in a very distinct and different sense than the main body of believers.

Other passages bring this out including Ephesians 3:7,8

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Here we have the same thought as in the passage from Romans with an important addition. This specific ministry involves preaching. If all are ministers, if all are preachers why would Paul speak in such terms?

Romans 10:14, 15 makes this point as well.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

⁵⁸ Strong's number 3007

⁵⁹ Stong's number 3011

⁶⁰ Joseph Thayer, D.D. *The New Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Indiana: Apqa 1981) 376

⁶¹ Gill, 134

⁶² Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, (Mac Donald Publishing Company) 619

All believers are called in some degree to witness for Christ, both in deeds and words. Notwithstanding this fact God has called and ordained specific people to whom He gives this special ministry. How clear the teaching of the Bible is! Just look at 1 Corinthians 12:27-31.

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Two things are obvious here. First there is an order or priority in spiritual gifts. Some are more important or significant than others. Secondly not all members of Christ's body have the same gifts. I would ask a simple question at this point. How many readers of this present work would have the desire and ability to write what I have written? I am not saying that this is a perfect work or anything of that nature, only that however feeble it maybe it took a great deal of research and effort. It was a joy for me, yet this is not a task that God gives to every believer. Others are gifted in ways I am not and I humble myself before them for often their gifts and talents far outshine my humble efforts. The point is that we are each gifted in unique ways and together we make one whole. Do all have some form of ministry? Yes, we do! Are we all ministers or clergy in the sense of being gifted and ordained by God to specific tasks like preaching and teaching? No, we are not! Some have places of prominence some do not yet all are important in God's perfect plan.

I make this point so strongly because this is one of the areas of truth that is under attack. When we must resort to quoting controversial Roman Catholic's like Hans Kung something is wrong.⁶³

The Priesthood of all believers is not meaningless, but at the same time we must take great care that our teaching on this subject is in harmony with the rest of scripture. The answer from scripture is that there were two basic categories of Christians in the early church. This division continues to this day. As John Gill brought out this has nothing to do with the priesthood of all believers. God's plan and purpose was to protect and care for his body through those specific individuals who are called to this task by the Holy Spirit.

⁶³ Jon Zens strongly endorsed a chapter of Robert C. Girard's book "Brethren, Hang Together" in which Girard quotes Hans Kung. This article can be found in the August 1981 edition of Searching Together on page 32. The article is titled "Reviving the Priesthood"

The Early Church, Our Example for Today?

In this section we will examine various facts about the early Church and how these facts should affect our practices today. The advocates of the open Church promote a return to the practices of the New Testament Church as opposed to our practices today. They do this in different ways, some more radical than others. The common theme is that anything after 312 AD is of little or no value. This was the date that Constantine had his famous 'conversion'. Some refuse to go beyond 100 AD or so, but the point is that the early church period, by whatever definition, should provide the norm for us today. If they had no buildings, we should have no buildings, if they fellowshiped in small groups we must fellowship in small groups and so it goes on. One of the great errors of the Roman Catholic Church is that it makes the outward form more important than the inward truth. In a similar way those who stress the 'body ministry' sometimes fall into this error. We must love one another and function together as a body, but must we follow some strict rule or outward form of how this must be done?

1. The danger of a premise becoming more important than the truth: Case study one.

Ernest Loosley's book, "When the Church was Young" provides an example of the danger of a concept becoming more important than the truth. Loosley's book was first published in 1935 and was edited and revised in 1988 by the Christian Books Publishing House. Jon Zens was instrumental in this and also actively promotes the book. On page 35 of the 1992-volume 20:1,2,3 issue of Searching Together he stated the following, "You will be challenged by Loosley's insight. He demonstrates a certain pristine beauty and simplicity in the early church that is often missing in the hustle and bustle of her modern counterpart. This excellent book...."

This, so called "excellent" book is one of the most dangerous of all the books and articles that I have read on this subject. When I say dangerous, I am speaking of danger in the sense of falsehood and error. Loosley, with regard to this book, is nothing more than a wolf in sheep's clothing. I realized this some years ago when I was in agreement with the doctrine that I now oppose. Even at that time I knew that there was something fundamentally wrong with this book. I was so concerned that I wrote a personal letter to Jon explaining in some detail what I felt and why. Even at that early date Jon felt that Loosley's message was more important than any possible faults the book might have. While preparing this paper I re-examined Loosley's book with the following results.

How does he view the practices of early Church? In the forward of his book he states that "The essentials are the things that are present at the beginning".⁶⁴ He goes on to speak of the early church as carrying a minimum of paraphernalia and then suggests that "We may yet find that the way of wisdom for ourselves lies in the pursuit of a similar policy".⁶⁵ In other words how the early Church went about things provides the ideal, what we should strive for today. This is the premise or concept, what the early church practiced should provide the norm for today.

To Loosley "the beginning" is the important time. This presupposition is not as straightforward as it sounds. What is "the beginning"? He gives no definitive definition of what the beginning is. Throughout the book he constantly redefines "the beginning". Some times its up the early parts of the book of Acts, sometimes it's the "earliest days" then we have a "later stage" when Gentile converts were added and so it goes on. All these divisions are arbitrary. Several important facts do emerge, as far as he is concerned the Old Testament has virtually no relevance and "the beginning" is whatever period of time that fits the point he is making at any given time. There is an even more serious problem here. If we take the first century as our milestone, we would be forced to say that a deeper understanding of the trinity or other important doctrines is not essential. This is what Loosley teaches.

Why do we have such a well-developed understanding of the truths of the Bible? One of the main reasons is controversy. Over time various people, have come on the stage of history troubling the Church with various heresies. It became necessary for the Church, through its leaders, to work out in great detail what the Bible really taught in opposition to what the heretics taught. Martian Luther and the many other leaders of the Reformation provide one example of this process. This is still going on today. In fact, that is why this present work was written. We have not arrived at all the truth and there is much in the way of error in what we believe and practice today. To say, however that we must go back to "the essentials" as Loosley does is preposterous. When we examine his book in more detail his real motive becomes clear.

⁶⁴ Ernest Loosley, When The Church Was Young, Auburn, Maine: Christian Books Publishing House 1988) Authors Forward

⁶⁵ Ibid., Forward

Loosley's book is divided into two parts with a total of ten chapters. The first part consists of seven chapters, which allegedly show what the Church did **not** have when it was young. The last three are supposed to show what it **did** have, presumably what he calls the essentials. The no side includes no buildings, no denominations, not fixed organization, no New Testament, no Vocabulary of its own, no dogmatic system, and no Sabbath rest. What it had includes an experience, a store of teaching from Christ and a gospel. Some of these subjects will be examined below. We will examine one chapter of this book now in order to see how he interprets scripture. Some of these are common themes presented in the open church literature. There is a strong emphasis on practice, what we do and how we do it, as opposed to doctrine or objective truth. What we do and how we do it becomes more important than why we are doing it.

Chapter 8 of "When the Church was Young" is titled 'An Experience'. This is the first of the three 'what it had' chapters. Perhaps the most telling remark in the whole book is found in this chapter. After quoting 1 John 1:1,3 Loosley states, "Dare we say a great experience is not everything".⁶⁶

Before we examine what, he means by "an experience" I want to follow the pattern of his book and look at what this experience does **not** include. Some of the things **not included** in Loosley's "experiences" are:

1. **The Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit has no place in this experience.
2. **The Old Testament.** The Old Testament has no place in this experience. (This is clearly seen in many parts of the book and in the various definitions he gives for "the beginning".)
3. **The New Birth.** The new birth has no place in this experience.
4. **Eternal Life.** Eternal life has no place in this experience.
5. **Christ's works.** Christ's works (obedience to the law, healing the sick, death on the cross etc.) as opposed to His person.
6. **Objective Truth.** Objective unchangeable truth has no place in this experience.

Obviously, he does not state it in this way yet as we shall see this is what he is really saying. Why do I say this and what does he mean by "an experience"? In order to answer these questions, we will briefly summarize chapter 8.

He states that the task is to examine the "content and meaning"⁶⁷ of this experience. He starts by saying that most people would think of the day of Pentecost as the source of their experience. One sentence stands out here. He rejects the day of Pentecost stating: "If the story of the apostolic experience is to have value for us, then what happened to them must be reproducible in our lives."⁶⁸ Notice that the giving of the Holy Spirit is of no importance to Loosley. He says that we must be able to have the same experience or it is of no value to us. When referring to the Holy Spirit here he uses a capital S. He categorically states that this experience has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit. He says: "Now when we look into the matter, we find that what these men witnessed to was not Pentecost. ... Their own great experience began with Jesus Christ rather than with the Holy Spirit."⁶⁹ Note that he uses a capital H and S.

What then is this "experience"? He gives his answer under five points. The first point is that they had been with Jesus on earth from the start of his ministry. In chapter four he uses the words "personal contact"⁷⁰ when speaking of this matter. He goes so far as to clearly state that knowing Christ **in this way** is what "new life in Christ"⁷¹ means. Notice it is not a new birth, but new life. Something added not something completely new. It is interesting to note that this is impossible for us to fulfill this condition today. We cannot have 'physical' contact with the Lord Jesus in the way that they did. Loosley has just stated that relevance is dependent on reproducibility. In this instance he flatly contradicts his own principle. He says that: "This was the experience which impelled these men. Not the teachings. Not the information. It was who he was."⁷² In other words objective truth has no value. This theme is found in other parts of this work. The second point he makes is that the spirit (lower case s) of Jesus (not the Holy Spirit) was inside of the apostles. There can be no mistake here the Holy Spirit has no part in this so-called experience. The presence, in some sense, of Christ's spirit is all that matters. He gives John 16:7 as a reference for this. This verse refers to one who will come after Christ. The word in the Greek is parakletos. It is translated as Comforter, Helper, Counselor etc. in our English Bibles. All orthodox Christians agree that this is the Holy Spirit, who was given to the apostles at Pentecost.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 68

⁶⁷ Ibid., 61-62

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62

⁶⁹ Ibid., 63

⁷⁰ Ibid., 36

⁷¹ Ibid., 36

⁷² Ibid., 36

Loosley's remarks however, make it crystal clear that he does not take the orthodox view. His third point is that "this abiding presence of Christ"⁷³ is what gave the apostles the power and energy to do what they did. In the fourth point he takes about their joy and the "feeling"⁷⁴ they had of having to share what had happened to them. His final point on this subject is that they finally realized that the world needed their message and that it was their job to spread the news of this experience.

In summary then this experience is the fact that they knew Jesus in the flesh, something that is not possible for us to duplicate and that in some sense Jesus' spirit (not the Holy Spirit) lived on in them and can live in us today. That's it! Let us now ask the question, how important is this "experience" to Loosley? After quoting 1 John 1:1,3 under his fifth point, as we saw above, Loosley states, "Dare we say a great experience is not everything".⁷⁵ He quotes Acts 5:20 and then says:

Life! Abundant life! Eternal life! Life with a richness and savor and quality and power of communicating itself, such as had never before been experienced. The very life of God. If there is life, and the means of sustaining it, it does not much matter what else is missing. Life can propagate itself, can create its own forms and instruments. Life contains within itself the hope and the possibility and the promise of unending progress. ... if only we might have more life - a fuller, richer deeper, more vital experience of the presence and power of the living Christ!"⁷⁶

He continues in this way for a few sentences and then, near the end of the chapter says: "He is the Way! That is because He is the life."⁷⁷

When we examine this carefully several things come to light. First of all, he is not talking about our having eternal life or of our being 'born again'. This forms no part of this so-called experience or of what he believes as expressed in this book. Secondly and this is the point I want to concentrate on, by way of illustration, he is very selective about what parts of Christ's person and work he refers to. This is the way a wolf (and the wolf's master, Satan) operates, part of the truth, never the whole truth.

First of all let us look at the last quote given above. "He is the Way! That is because He is the life." The scriptural passage here, which he did not quote, is John 14:6: " Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

What is Jesus teaching us in this statement? First and most important he is not talking about an experience, but about God. If we remove God from this passage as Loosley clearly does we remove all meaning from it. The reader may counter and say "But Loosley refers to God in the very quote you just gave. " I ask the reader is the life he details in the quote above life, as God knows it? Just as the ancient Romans and Greeks invented gods with human characteristics so Loosley has invented a sub-standard god for his personal use.

Exodus 3:14 reads as follows: "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Jesus states the following in John 8:58 "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.'" God is the maker of heaven and earth, He is perfect and complete beyond our comprehension, His existence is without beginning and without end. Jesus, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is God. God knows nothing of personal progress or of a hope that His future may be better than what He presently experiences. James 1:17 states: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

Jesus is the way the truth and the life, because he is God. He is the way because of His person and work (these include, for example, His death and resurrection as well as His complete lack of sin and His perfect fulfillment of the law). He is the truth and the life because he is the source or fountain of all truth and all life. Truth and life do not exist apart from God. The life he gives us in salvation is the very life of God, the Holy Spirit living in us, teaching us of Christ. Literally being born again is the result of receiving this life.

Loosley also deliberately leaves this out, not only in the quote above, but also in the Bible passage he quotes. He quoted 1 John 1:1,3 but not two, why? This passage reads as follows.

⁷³ Ibid., 66

⁷⁴ Ibid., 67

⁷⁵ Ibid., 68

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68,69

⁷⁷ Ibid., 69

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

His concern is **not** the objective reality of God in heaven (Jesus as the way the truth and the life), **but** the subjective "experience" of the apostles on earth. In other words, the veracity of God founded upon His nature and character is of no importance. The all-important thing is our subjective evaluation, our experience. John is carefully guarding against error by bringing out the eternal nature of Christ that he is in fact God.⁷⁸ To Loosley this is not important because our perception outweighs the reality.

Next we must look at Acts 5:20. As we saw in the quote above, he uses this verse to give validity to his meaning of "this life." This passage reads as follows: "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life."

This is one of his 'proof texts'. How does this square with what he actually teaches? He stated in a quotation given above that it is "Not the teachings. Not the information" that is of any value. In other words what Jesus taught is unimportant, it is separate from "this life". Acts 5:20 teaches the exact opposite to Loosley's teaching. The English words "the words" in this verse come from the Greek word 'rhema'. In the context here it means "the whole doctrine".⁷⁹ The Bible knows of no such thing as life without truth. Doctrine is that which is taught or teaching. All this is in direct contrast to what Loosley would have us believe. Finally, what does this word "life" mean in Acts 5:20? The word here is 'zoe', here it means "eternal and immortal life.... The blessing of real life after the resurrection."⁸⁰ The same word is used in Col. 3:3 and many other passages. It's not the promise or possibility of a better life on earth. It is eternal life, which comes from being born again through faith in the person and work of Christ.

Before we leave this subject there is one other matter that we must examine if we are to be fair to the book 'When the Church was Young'. As I have stressed above Loosley expressly states that it was "... the experience which impelled these men. Not the teachings. Not the information. It was who he was!"⁸¹ This is very emphatic, very definite. Yet in the very next chapter he says something different. This bears directly on chapter eight so we must briefly examine this point. Chapter nine is the shortest chapter in the book, just over two pages long. The title is 'A Store of Teaching from Christ'. The Old Testament, the Holy Spirit, the work of Christ and many other things are treated as if they did not exist or were of no value as in the previous chapter and the rest of the book. There is one striking exception. He states that an experience by its self is not enough. "An 'experience' might possibly be thought of as an emotional state, a transient sentiment. Had that been all the church had when it was young, it would quickly have subsided, the members in the movement left flat and spiritless."⁸² The experience without the teaching would have led to failure. This is a blatant contradiction. True contradictions are a sure sign of error this is why so many people have tried to find a real contradiction in the Bible (this has been without success).

Loosley quotes Acts 2:42 and then gives this very narrow definition of what this 'deposit' is. He states that "The body of truth as proclaimed by Jesus in the hearing of the apostles ... His teachings, which he handed down to His disciples, were of course, the result of His own experience."⁸³ He goes on to ask what this deposit is then says that it is what Jesus revealed to man on the basis of "being there".⁸⁴ Only what Jesus spoke specifically to the apostles and that alone is what he will except. No actions, no death or resurrection or atonement, no Old Testament unless spoken by Jesus. Do genuine Christians view the 'deposit' in this way? What of Paul, he never knew Jesus in the flesh. Jesus never spoke to Paul in the way that Loosley defines. All the apostles, through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit revealed truth beyond which Jesus had imparted. What is this deposit? The Greek word here is 'parakatatheke'. According to Thayer it means "the correct knowledge and pure doctrine of the gospel, to be held firmly and faithfully, and to be conscientiously delivered unto others".⁸⁵ What does Paul say?

⁷⁸ See also John 1:1 and John 14:6 etc.

⁷⁹ Thayer, 562

⁸⁰ Ibid., 274

⁸¹ Loosley, 64

⁸² Ibid., 71

⁸³ Ibid., 72

⁸⁴ Ibid., 72

⁸⁵ Thayer, 482-483

*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:*⁸⁶

The Gospel or 'the deposit' is not so much what Jesus said, though that is also vitally important, it is who He is and what He did and what this means to fallen mankind. The gospel of the Bible is a far cry from what Loosley calls 'a gospel'. This has its foundation firmly rooted in the Old Testament scriptures as the above passage shows.

I hope that this analysis illustrates the importance of closely examining what is being taught. Much more could be said against this book, but that is not the primary purpose of this paper. Loosley's book has great appeal to the advocates of the open church because it harmonizes with their agenda not because it is in harmony with the Bible.

2. The danger of a premise becoming more important than the truth: Case study two.

The winter 1999 issue of Searching Together was referenced above. In the opening article "Only One Speaks in a dialogue?" Jon Zens asks this question: "On what valid exegetical grounds, then do we make one man's 'sermon' the central focus of weekly Christian gatherings?"⁸⁷ In the first part of the article he examines the word dialogue and its use in the New Testament. This leads to the question. He continues to examine this subject and then asks another question:

*Can we truly handle New Testament truth responsibly and still suggest that it is Christ's revealed will for the same man's sermons to be the central focus of every weekly gathering? Every glimpse we have of those early assembly times points to an informal, participatory format. Exegetes uniformly admit to this fact. Paul's most detailed remarks on Christian gatherings, such as in 1 Cor. 14, encourage various forms of participation with the possibility of multiple speakers who humbly subject themselves to a free and open evaluation by the rest. It is a model that assumes a many-member involvement, not just a one-man show (1 Cor. 12:7,14).*⁸⁸

He makes some assumptions on the basis of this as follows:

*In Eph. 4:11-13 it is clear that Christ bestows special abilities on some of his saints so that they can help "prepare" the rest for "works of service." He uses elders (plural), for example, to "feed" his flock (cf. Acts 20:28), and the sound teaching they provide is certainly an important part of assembly life. The dominant role that tradition assigns to one specially ordained "minister" (singular), however is totally without a New Testament foundation.*⁸⁹

There is a premise that lies behind these questions and the answers he gives. This can be seen by the terms he uses. On the one hand we find "valid exegetical grounds", "New Testament truth", "Christ's revealed will" and "New Testament foundation". In addition, in the last sentence of this introduction he uses the term "New Testament warrant". On the other hand we have "weekly Christian gatherings", "every weekly gathering", "informal participatory format", "various forms of participation" and etc. These phrases reference the same thing, how Christians are to practice the **outward** aspects of worship when they meet together. Should one speak or many that is the theme. This is clearly spelt out in the sentence quoted above: "the dominant role that tradition assigns to one specially ordained "minister" (singular), however is totally without a New Testament foundation."

We are left with only one possible conclusion: The outward format of weekly worship as practiced by the New Testament Churches is binding upon us today. In other words, any other outward form of worship is sinful. This is his, (and all who follow this teaching), basic premise. If it is not sinful then why make such a fuss over it? Now the important point here is what possible basis can this premise have? If this is true why is it true. If it is not true then those who teach such things are false teachers **as regards this subject**.

The key here is the fact that we are clearly dealing with outward actions. Is one person going to teach or many, what format is the service going to take. Mr. Zens is clearly concerned with the outward format of the service and not with

⁸⁶ I Corinthians 15:1-6

⁸⁷ page 1

⁸⁸ page 2

⁸⁹ pages 2-3

the more spiritual aspects of worship. These and similar questions remind me of our Lord's words as found in Matthew 23:25, 26

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

This is exactly what the Jews did in regard to the Law. They placed great significance upon the outward actions, washing of hands, not eating etc. These outward things had meaning and importance, but the primary purpose of the Law was to lead the Jews to Christ. The real purpose of the weekly meeting, "the central focus" as Jon Zens puts it, is to worship and glorify God. The content and outcome is much more important than the structure of the meeting. What do we take with us when we leave the meeting? Do we glorify God more, does Christ mean more to us, and do we love our brothers and sisters more, have we heard the truth proclaimed, do we hate sin more than before? These are the important things. Time after time the 'open church' advocates speak of 'no buildings' 'small groups of people' 'mass participation' and 'no one man show'. In other words, they concentrate on the outward. True worship is inward, in spirit and in truth and not outward, as in the one or many question. Jon Zens was aware of this fact. Near the end of an article titled "Why is the order of our Church Set in Concrete?" Jon makes the following statement: "Taking issue with a traditional form is hardly the point. The N.T. is concerned much more with life than with form. But when a form is made a 'law', and stifles life in the process, this should be of grave concern to us".⁹⁰ Seventeen years later he ignores his own advice and does just the opposite in both regards. He makes form more important than life and he sets the order of worship in concrete.

If we follow Jon Zens's logic of allowing only what the New Testament explicitly details we would need to have the same type of participation. In other words, we must ignore the fact that the canon of scripture is complete. We must have prophesy in the same way they did, speak in tongues in the same way, work miracles of healing in the same way and etc. Take for example 1 Cor. 14:26. If this provides an example of binding truth for us today then the whole verse must be binding. This means that in any given service some must speak in tongues, some must interpret, other must have a word of revelation. Unless these elements are present, we are not following "New Testament Truth". Simply put we cannot pick and choose which parts we want to carry over into practice today. Remember Jon is equating practice with biblical truth. If it is so set in stone then the whole thing, as it is related to us, is set in stone not just the parts that we happen to want to champion. If we omit the reasons why they worshiped as they did of what value will the outward actions of be?

There are additional factors to consider as well. One gets the impression from the quotations given above that the New Testament is full of examples on this subject and that all these examples point in one direction only. Such is not the case. One passage is constantly emphasized for the simple reason that it is the only detailed passage in the New Testament that supports the open church position of multiple participation in the weekly service. This passage is 1 Cor. 14. Another example of how 1 Cor. 14 is used can be found in the Third Quarter, 1982 Searching Together (Vol. 11:3). On page eight there is an article by Jon Zens titled "What is a 'Minister'?". In this article Jon lists thirteen principles. Number nine is "The principle of Multiple Participation". Not surprisingly the only passage cited is 1 Cor. 14. Jon goes so far as to say: "Are we not violating a revealed principle by emphasizing one man...."⁹¹ At the end of this article Jon asks a question in direct relation to what he had written: "But why should truth be postponed?"⁹² This is the same faulty logic we examined above. Is the outward practice of one specific New Testament church binding on us today? Is it **truth**? If we answer yes to these questions, on what basis do we practice only part of this so-called binding example? Any practice detailed in the New Testament would be binding if it equaled the truth as truth is unchanging.

There is at least one other passage, Acts 2:41, 42, which provides a different perspective.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Not unexpectedly, Jon Zens, in the article referred to above, makes an attempt to fit this passage to his pre-defined mold. He correctly identifies four elements in the above text. As they stand in the text they are the apostles doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. He defines the first as "Apostolic teaching". He states "We have studied in

⁹⁰ Searching Together, Third Quarter 1982, Volume 11:3, page 48

⁹¹ page 15

⁹² page 21 (This is part of a quote from an earlier article from B.R.R.)

the first twelve principles, I trust, some of these apostolic principles".⁹³ In other words his teaching is what the apostles taught and therefore is to be followed. In actual fact this passage does not support his views. The important aspects of worship summarized here are teaching of the truth (in our day this would involve the preaching or teaching of the truths of the Bible), fellowship, the Lord's supper and or common meals together and communal prayer. With regard to fellowship one Bible dictionary gives the following meaning under the heading of our fellowship with one another.

(2.) Of saints with one another, in duties (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18); in ordinances (Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:46); in grace, love, joy, etc. (Malachi 3:16; 2 Corinthians 8:4); mutual interest, spiritual and temporal (Romans 12:4, 13; Hebrews 13:16); in sufferings (Romans 15:1, 2; Galatians 6:1, 2; Romans 12:15; and in glory (Revelation 7:9)).⁹⁴

This shows the wide variety of meaning that this term implies even when it is limited to human to human fellowship. The exact 'how' is not important, does one man teach or several is of little importance compared to what is taught and how it is received and practiced. The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 2:2 states "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." This is the doctrine: Christ in all his perfection's, not the outward form of a meeting. We are one in Christ not one because we all get to teach or preach.

3. Differences then and now.

One major difference is that the canon of scripture was not complete. What do we mean by the "canon of scripture"? Basically, the canon is the list of books which the true church of God has recognized as being inspired by the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is the Bible as we have it today. The Bible contains the documents given to the Church by God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. F.F. Bruce, among other scholars, has written a book on this subject.⁹⁵ This is an important subject, but it is beyond the scope of this article. What is important for our purpose is the fact that early church had only the first half of the cannon, the Old Testament.

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, in the first chapter and the first verse states that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". The last book of the Bible is Revelation. At the end of the last chapter, (22) there is a somber warning. Verses 18 and 19 read as follows:

For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book

This illustrates the fact that the cannon of scripture is now complete. No new revelation will be given. This was not the case in the early church during the time when the books of our current New Testament were being written. The Church as we find it in the New Testament was totally unique. The founding of the early Church was a onetime only event in the history of the world. It is an **absolute impossibility** to live and act as they did **in every respect**, nor should we even desire to. Where possible, and when it is warranted, we should strive to follow the patterns set down in the inspired books of the Bible, but common sense and careful evaluation is needed.

Why did the early church have the form of worship that it did? One important reason is that this form provided the necessary means of imparting the truth and establishing the Church in its infancy. As I said before this was a unique time and unique measures were needed to bring the early church through this critical period. Truth was imparted and authenticated in an exceptional way. Now that we have the final cannon of scripture these methods have fallen away and new methods have arisen. Simply put truth is authenticated in a different way and consequently our form of worship has changed.

This is a very serious matter. We have the complete New Testament they did not; this is a fact that alters our practice. One obvious change is that we no longer have apostles.

⁹³ Searching Together, Third quarter 1982 Vol. 2:3, page 20

⁹⁴ M.G. Easton, A Dictionary of Bible Terms, from the Illustrated Bible Dictionary Third Edition published by Thomas Nelson, 1897

⁹⁵ "The canon of scripture", published by Inter Varsity Press, copyright 1988.

The apostles in many respects were the living breathing New Testament of that time. They were pioneers, blazing the trail that others would follow. The actual term apostle occurs over eighty times in the New Testament, mostly in the writings of Luke and Paul. It is used in different senses, but the primary meaning of the word is of a person, who knew Jesus intimately, was a witness of the resurrection and had been chosen by Jesus Christ Himself. Now before we proceed it is manifest that these criteria limit the timeframe in which such persons could exist, i.e. to the time of the early church. It is simply not possible or needful to have apostles in the primary meaning of that term today.

Out of all the people living in and around Galilee at that time Jesus chose twelve (Mark 3:14f). Others including the apostle Paul were added to this group and one was removed. The fact is that there were a very limited number of apostles in the strictest sense of the term. They were given a unique insight into the deep things of God as well as unique abilities. John 20:21ff and John 14:25,26,27) among other passages bring this out.

There is a wide spread tendency today to apply passages, which have a very specific scope in a very general way. In the verses from John 14 Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would remind the apostles of "whatsoever I have said unto you". These words were spoken to certain men who he had picked and trained. They were to be given special insight into what Jesus had personally taught them and into even deeper truths beyond that. In other words, they were to be equipped to complete the task of laying the foundations of the Church, (Eph. 2:20, Rev. 21:14), and of creating what we now call the New Testament. We must be careful when applying verses such as these to our present-day existence. They have some application to us personally, but their primary reference was to the apostles. How can we be reminded of words that Jesus spoke to us personally while he was on earth? All this shows the unique characteristics of this early time period. One cannot read the books of the New Testament without realizing the supreme power and authority that the original apostles had on the subject of doctrine (truth vs. error). The Roman Catholic Church, following in the footsteps of its ultimate leader, Satan, imitates this with the Pope. To the best of my knowledge, those who want to reinvent Church history and return to the pattern of the early Church do not seek to reinstate the primary office of the apostles. Yet how can we return to such a state without this major aspect of life as the early Christians knew it? Such a fundamental change must of necessity change the way we conduct ourselves today.

How many of the readers of this article personally know of someone who has the power of bring the dead back to life? How about the ability to heal the lame? My point is that the purpose and place of genuine miracles has changed from what it was in New Testament times. I have personally experienced a variety of miracles and am an ardent believer in the power of God to override the natural course of events when and how He chooses to do so. I am certain that when it is according to His purpose God still brings the dead back to life in our day and age. Miracles during the time of the New Testament had at least one purpose that I believe was specific to that time. That purpose was to provide authentication for the one who performed the miracles. In the case of our Lord Jesus Christ this is fairly obvious. The same is true with regard to the apostles as 1 Corinthians 2:11,12 shows.

I am become a fool in glorying); ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

What were these "signs" but the working of various miracles which, proved that a Divine commission had been given to Paul. Clearly each apostle had this ability to some extent and for the same reason. The new birth is of course a miracle, one that is in full force even today. Just as Paul spoke to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:2) we can look upon those who have been saved by our ministry. The signs Paul refers clearly includes this sign yet at the same time he had in mind many other miracles that were common at that time but are rare or no-existent today. Our needs and therefore our abilities are different.

Before we leave this part of this subject it must be noted that some New Testament references indicate that there were a considerable number of apostles besides the original twelve and Paul. One such passage is 1 Corinthians 15:5ff. For our purposes this is not an important point, as all the apostles would have had to meet the qualifications of that office. These qualifications make it impossible for that office to continue beyond the times in which the New Testament was written.

One other important difference is that the New Testament times were a time of severe persecution. Christians today, who live in countries like the United States or England, have seldom if ever known true physical persecution for their faith. Yet this was a daily reality to most of the members of the early church. Why did they meet in small groups in private homes? Was this purely a matter of choice, what they did because it was what they wanted to do? According to the advocates of the open Church teaching the two factors of small groups and home churches is not only what they wanted to do but also it is the only biblically correct way. In actual fact the early church had no real choice. Even during Christ's three years of ministry there was intense opposition from the Jews. This intensified after the stoning of

Stephen. Later the Roman government relentlessly persecuted the early believers. Most authorities believe the John was the only original apostle who died of old age. Countless believers died at the hands of murders. Many more lost all their worldly goods. Under such circumstances the early church was for the most part an underground church. Under the threat of attack we will gladly live in caves or other dark places. Yet when peace comes, we eagerly seek the sun and open places above ground.

In conclusion, where warranted we must follow the examples provided for us in the Bible. Were they generous in the matter of giving, diligent in study, patient in persecution then we must follow their example. This does not mean that we must literally wash each other's feet. Such is not our custom nor is there a need as our roads are paved theirs were plain dirt. The principle behind the feet washing is what is important; we must humble ourselves and esteem others better than ourselves. The early church met most of the time in small groups in local houses. This may be of benefit to us today, if so, we should follow their example, this does not mean, however, that any other practice is forbidden. We must do what best glorifies God and advances His kingdom. Should one teach or several? If only one is truly gifted and called then one should teach. If it is practical and beneficial then more than one should bear the burden.

The Church vs. Local Churches, What is the Body?

There is an amazing degree of confusion and miss-guided teaching on the subject of what the Church is. It is not uncommon to find sweeping generalizations based upon the wrong interpretation of one or two passages. For this reason, we must examine carefully what the Bible teaches us relying firmly on careful exegesis. As is most often the case God has given us more than ample instruction on this most important subject. Various references cite various subdivisions for the meaning of this word. I have chosen to limit the choices to three, though six or more are possible.

1. Ekklesia (Church) as the sum total of all believers

Matthew 16:18,19

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Perhaps the most important passage is from our Lord's teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. Here we find the first occurrence of the word ekklesia or as we have it in English church. The fact that this is the first occurrence and this from the very words of Christ should remove all doubt as to the importance of the meaning given here. What ever other meanings the word church may have the meaning here must at all cost be preserved and given its rightful place.

We learn several things about the Church from this passage. It is not of human invention or workmanship, but something that Christ Himself builds. There is nothing uncertain or haphazard in relation to the building of this edifice and nothing can hinder its completion. Most importantly for our purposes here the church in this passage is portrayed as a universal entity, all believers everywhere, from every era, form one body or group. This fact should be self-evident, as any other meaning would be meaningless.

William Hendriksen in his commentary on this passage brings this out. "The expression 'my church' refers, of course, to the church universal, here especially to the entire 'body of Christ' or 'sum total of all believers' (cf. Acts 9:31; I Cor. 6:4, 12:28; Eph. 1:22, 3:10, 21; 5:22-33; Col. 1:18; Phil. 3:6)."⁹⁶

Thayer's "Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament" identifies this meaning for the word church. Heading bb reads as follows: "the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth. Collectively, all who worship and honor God and Christ in whatever place they may be." The following passages are listed here: Mt. 16:18; 1 Co. 12:28; Eph. 1:22, 3:10, 5:23, 27, 29, 32; Phil. 3:6; Col. 1:18, 24; Gal. 1:13; 1 Co. 15:9, and 1 Tim. 3:15. Additionally Heb. 12:23 is listed as all Christians already in heaven.⁹⁷

We will return to Matthew 16:18,19 latter when we examine the relationship between the church and the kingdom of heaven. The following are some of the other passages listed under the "the whole body of Christians" subheading from Thayer's.

1 Timothy 3:15

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Matthew Henry in his commentary on this passage brings this out this universal aspect in this way.

*Timothy must know how to behave himself, not only in the particular church where he was now appointed to reside for some time, but being an evangelist, and the apostle's substitute, he must learn how to behave himself in other churches, where he should in like manner be appointed to reside for some time; and therefore it is not the church of Ephesus, but the catholic church, which is here called the house of God, which is the church of the living God.*⁹⁸

⁹⁶ William Hendriksen, The Gospel of Matthew, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 648

⁹⁷ Thayer, 196

⁹⁸ Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible Vol. 6, (London: Pickering & Inglis) 817

Louis Berkhof in his "Systematic Theology" references this passage. "d. Pillar and ground of the truth. There is just one place in which that name is applied to the Church, namely, 1 Tim. 3:15. It clearly refers to the Church in general, and therefore also applies to every part of it."⁹⁹

Matthew Poole comments on this passage as follows:

Ver. 15. I do not know how God will dispose of me, though I hope shortly to see thee, and therefore I have written to direct thee how in the meantime thou shouldst carry thyself in the affairs of the church, which I have committed to thee, which is a matter of great moment; for the people which constitute the church of him who is not like the gods of the heathens, a dead man consecrated and made a god, nor a being without life, like their images, but one who hath life in himself and from himself, is the house of God, a people in and amongst whom he dwelleth, and amongst whom he is worshipped; and of whom he hath a great care, and for which he hath a great love, Christ having died for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, # Eph 5:26; and which (as a man doth by his house) he is daily enlarging, beautifying, and adorning with the graces of his Holy Spirit, that (as there, #Eph 5:27) he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Which church is the pillar and ground of the truth, stulov kai edraiwma. We want a good English word whereby to translate the latter of the two words in the Greek, which possibly hath advantaged the great contests about the sense of this text. It comes from edra, which signifieth a star, and a thing to support, and a seat, the place (say some) in which the idol was set in the pagan temples. Thence this word edraiwma is translated, the underpropper, the establisher, any firm basis upon which a thing standeth or leaneth; so that it is much of the same significancy with the former word, which we rightly translate a pillar, the two things signifying in use the same thing, that which underproppeth and holdeth up another thing, as the pillars do the building, and the basis of the image or statue doth the statue. Pillars also were of ancient use to fasten upon them any public edicts, which princes or courts would have published, and exposed to the view of all; hence the church is called, the pillar and basis, or seal, of truth, because by it the truths of God are published, supported, and defended, and in it they are only to be found as in their proper seat and place; for to it the oracles and mysteries of God are committed, and in it they are exposed to the notice and knowledge of all, as public edicts are upon pillars. But neither that saving truth, nor the faith which we give to it, is established upon the authority of the church, (as the Romanists vainly pretend), but upon the authority of God the author of it. The church discovers and recommends the truth, but the testimony it gives is not the foundation of its credibility. The universal church (of which the church of Ephesus, over which Timothy had a charge, was a genuine part) is, in the sense before expressed, the pillar and supporter, or seat, of truth.¹⁰⁰

Notice in particular the last sentence from the quotation above. It is the universal church (all believers everywhere), which is the pillar and ground of the truth. Each local gathering has a part to play but is not in and of its self-the pillar and supporter. This is the orthodox reformed position on this passage. The importance of this will become clear shortly.

Ephesians 3:10

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

Louis Berkhof references this passage after the following comments:

Finally, the word in its most comprehensive meaning signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour. This use of the word is found primarily in the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and the Colossians, most frequently in the former.¹⁰¹

Here as in many other instances the context clearly defines the meaning. As we saw when studying Matt. 16:18,19 reference works such as Thayers include this passage under the universal heading To limit the meaning to an individual local assembly is without warrant, the reference is to all believers, universal not local.

1 Corinthians 12:28

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

⁹⁹ Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 558

¹⁰⁰ Poole, Vol 4, 689

¹⁰¹ Berkhof, S.T., 557

"The church" in this passage must mean more than those gathered in any one locality otherwise each assembly would of necessity need to contain, in the plural, members manifesting each of these ministries. The obvious meaning is that of Matt. 16:18: the church that God Himself is building. Ephesians 2:20 bears this out.

There is a great deal more scriptural evidence for the concept of the universal body of believers. This will be examined in some of the following subheadings where different words will be examined. It is already clear that a primary (perhaps the primary as this is how Christ Himself introduced it to us) meaning of the word church is that of the universal body of believers. Subdivisions within this group would include those present on earth at any particular time, those already in heaven, true believers as opposed to false and etc.

2. Ekklesia (Church) as a small number of Christians

Here is the opposite extreme from that of the universal Church. Any small gathering of two or more Christians to practice the ordinances of the kingdom is an ekklesia.

Romans 16:5

Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaphroditus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.

Colossians 4:15

Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.

Most likely these houses would not have been large and the total number of believers meeting at one time would have been similar to those meeting in what we call "house churches" today. The fact that the number of believers can be as few as two is clearly seen from our Lord's own words: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."¹⁰²

Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's comments on this passage bring this out.

On this passage--so full of sublime encouragement to Christian union in action and prayer--observe, first, the connection in which it stands. Our Lord had been speaking of church meetings before which the obstinate perversity of a brother was in the last resort to be brought, and whose decision was to be final--such honor does the Lord of the Church put upon its lawful assemblies. But not these assemblies only does He deign to countenance and honor. For even two uniting to bring any matter before Him shall find that they are not alone, for My Father is with them, says Jesus. Next, observe the premium here put upon union in prayer. As this cannot exist with fewer than two, so by letting it down so low as that number, He gives the utmost conceivable encouragement to union in this exercise. But what kind of union? Not an agreement merely to pray in concert, but to pray for some definite thing. "As touching anything which they shall ask," says our Lord--anything they shall agree to ask in concert. At the same time, it is plain He had certain things at that moment in His eye, as most fitting and needful subjects for such concerted prayer. The Twelve had been "falling out by the way" about the miserable question of precedence in their Master's kingdom, and this, as it stirred their corruptions, had given rise--or at least was in danger of giving rise--to "offenses" perilous to their souls. The Lord Himself had been directing them how to deal with one another about such matters. "But now shows He unto them a more excellent way." Let them bring all such matters--yea, and everything whatsoever by which either their own loving relationship to each other, or the good of His kingdom at large, might be affected--to their Father in heaven; and if they be but agreed in petitioning Him about that thing, it shall be done for them of His Father which is in heaven. But further, it is not merely union in prayer for the same thing--for that might be with very jarring ideas of the thing to be desired--but it is to symphonious prayer, the prayer by kindred spirits, members of one family, servants of one Lord, constrained by the same love, fighting under one banner, cheered by assurances of the same victory; a living and loving union, whose voice in the divine ear is as the sound of many waters. Accordingly, what they ask "on earth" is done for them, says Jesus, "of My Father which is in heaven." Not for nothing does He say, "of MY FATHER" --not "YOUR FATHER"; as is evident from what follows: "For where two or three are gathered together unto My name" --the "My" is emphatic, "there am I in the midst of them." As His name would prove a spell to draw together many clusters of His dear disciples, so if there should be but two or three, that will attract Himself down into the midst of them; and related as He is to both the parties, the petitioners and the Petitioned--to the one on earth by

¹⁰² Matthew 18:20

*the tie of His assumed flesh, and to the other in heaven by the tie of His eternal Spirit--their symphonious prayers on earth would thrill upward through Him to heaven, be carried by Him into the holiest of all, and so reach the Throne. Thus will He be the living Conductor of the prayer upward, and the answer downward.*¹⁰³

One important fact emerges from these and similar passages. This is in regard to Hebrews 10:24 and 25 where we are warned not to "forsake the assembling together" of believers. I would ask a very serious question in this regard; is formal church membership more important than true fellowship? This could be rephrased in this manner: is there no true fellowship apart from membership in a specific local church? The answer of course depends on one's definition of what constitutes a "church" and so we find ourselves involved in a never-ending inquiry. The problem arises because many, in our day, limit the meaning of the word "church" to that third definition which follows. When we follow our Lord's teaching the answer is unambiguous and direct. While the majority of believers belong to such "churches" others find true fellowship in a less formal way. As the Bible clearly teaches formal "church" membership (as is detailed in the third category below), is the standard and most Christians adhere to this. This does not mean, however, that any other practice is to be rejected out of hand. Even those who regularly fellowship in one place should not limit their fellowship to that circle of believers alone. Sometimes it is not possible or practical to belong to a church in the traditional sense. If we are deliberately isolating ourselves from all contact with other believers we are sinning and can fully expect the Lord's discipline if we are truly His children. On the other hand, if we **must** find fellowship in a less formal way we may be in complete obedience to God's word and in His perfect will. Any meeting for the purpose of obeying Christ and bringing about His kingdom constitutes a "church" in an informal way. Historically, at least in Protestant denominations, there are three things that any formal church must have. These are that the Gospel is truly preached, that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are administered and that discipline is practiced. Clearly informal meetings between a few Christians do not constitute a church under this definition yet we must not deny our Lord's teaching as found in Matthew 18:20. Beware of those who would bring undo pressure to bear in this regard. On the other hand, be equally careful of your own heart least through pride you think you can stand alone apart from other believers. Fellowship in some form is essential.

The best teaching on Hebrews 10:25, that I have found, comes from the pen of Arthur W. Pink. There is so much confusion and false teaching with regard to this passage that I feel compelled to give this quotation at some length. It is taken from Pink's commentary on Hebrews and reads as follows:

First, the Hebrews are cautioned against forsaking public worship. Second, it is pointed out that "some" had already done so. Third, they are bidden to exhort one another with increased diligence. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Before attempting exposition of these words, let us first relieve them of a false application which some seek to make of them today. Just as of old Satan made a wrong use of Psalm 91:11, 12 in his tempting of the Savior (Matthew 4:6), so he does with the verse before us. Few are aware of how often the Devil brings a scripture before our minds. When a Christian is seeking to be out and out for Christ, the Devil will quote to him "Be not righteous overmuch" (Ecclesiastes 7:16); likewise when a child of God resolves to obey 2 Timothy 3:5 and Hebrews 13:13 and separate from all who do not live godly, the Enemy reminds him of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Romanists used the same text in the early days of the Reformation, and charged Luther and his friends with disobeying this Divine command. But God's Word does not contradict itself: it does not tell us in one place "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14), and here bid the "sheep" to fraternize with "goats." When rightly understood, this verse affords no handle to those who seek to discourage faithfulness to Christ. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." John Owen rightly pointed out that, "There is a synecdoche (a part put for the whole) in the word 'assembling,' and it is put for the whole worship of Christ, because worship was performed in their assemblies; and he that forsakes the assemblies, forsakes the worship of Christ, as some of them did when exposed to danger." What is here deported is the total relinquishment of Christianity. It is not "Cease not to attend the assembly," but "forsake not," abandon not the assembling of yourselves together. It is not the sin of sloth or of schism which is here considered, but that of apostasy. If a professing Christian forsook the Christian churches and became a Mohammedan he would disobey this verse; but for one who puts the honor of Christ before everything else, to turn his back upon the so-called churches where He is now so grievously dishonored, is not a failure to comply with its terms.

The Greek word for "Forsake not" is a very strong and emphatic one, being a double compound, and signifies "to abandon in time of danger." It is the word used by the agonizing Redeemer on the Cross, when He cried,¹⁷⁴ "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was used by Him again when He declared, "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine

¹⁰³ Jamieson Vol. 2, 50

Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:27). It is the word employed by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:10, “Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.” It is found in only one other place in this epistle, where it is in obvious antithesis from the verse now before us: “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

Thus, it will appear that a total and final abandonment of the public profession of Christianity is what is here warned against. One may therefore discern how that verse 25 supplies a most appropriate link between verses 23, 24 and verse 26. Verse 25 prescribes another means to enable the wavering Hebrews to remain constant in the Christian faith. If they were to “hold fast the confession of faith without wavering,” and if they were to “consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works,” then they must not “forsake the assembling” of themselves together. The word for “assembling together” is a double compound, and occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Thessalonians 2:1: “our gathering together unto Him,” that is unto Christ; this also shows that the “assembling together” here is under one Head, and that the “forsaking” is because He has been turned away from. To enforce the above caution, the apostle adds, “as the manner of some is.” The Greek word for “manner” signifies “custom,” and is so translated In Luke 2:42. This supplies additional confirmation that the evil against which the Hebrews were deported was no mere occasionally absenting themselves from the Christian churches, but a deliberate, fixed and final departure from them. In John 6:66 we read that “From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him”; John also wrote of those who “went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19); whilst at the close of his labors Paul had to say “All they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Timothy 1:15). So here, some who had made a profession of the Christian faith had now abandoned the same and gone back to Judaism. It was to warn the others against this fatal step that the apostle now wrote as he did — compare 1 Corinthians 10:12, Romans 11:20.¹⁰⁴

3. Ekklesia (Church) as a specific group of Christians

If any number of people were asked the question: what does the word church mean, they would probably give one of the following answers. That it means a particular physical building (the church at 215 Main St.), that it means a denomination like the Baptists or Lutherans or that it is a specific group of people who meet regularly at a given location (the people rather than the location).

The Bible often uses ekklesia in the latter sense. Sometimes this refers to a particular body of believers, at other times to all those in a particular city or region. Our most common meaning today is in regard to a local body of believers meeting on a regular basis in some type of building. The city of Pittsburgh Pa. has a multitude of "churches" in this sense. As the Bible clearly teaches these formal gatherings are made up of more than a few people and as was previously stated provide the normal platform for Christian fellowship and practice. Our purpose here is not the actual physical structure, in regard to leadership etc., or the purpose of such gathering, but the existence of such groups.

As there is no controversy over this point the following Bible references should be all that are needed in this regard.

Acts 13:1 All the disciples in Antioch, forming several different congregations, were one church.

1Corinthians 1:2 The church of God at Corinth

Revelation 2:1 The church of Ephesus

4. Other words or phrases of importance

It was noted in part 1 of this section that Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon lists fifteen verses under the universal church heading. It is a clear fact the there are many more passages that use the word church in the limited local aspect. I counted just over one hundred in my Strong's concordance. While this sheds no light on the relative importance of each usage some open church advocates have made much of this fact. This will be examined shortly. What is often not stated is the other words or phrases that clearly refer to the universal aspect as opposed to the local. Again, numbers alone mean little in this regard. Even if there were more 'universal' passages this sheds no light on relative importance. It is the actual content or teaching that these passages contain that is important.

¹⁰⁴ A. W. Pink, Commentary on Hebrews, Chapter 52 pg. 170 (Taken from The Arthur Pink Collection, Ages Digital Library copyright 2000 Ages Software inc.)

Scripture uses various words in this context. A vine (Romans 11:17) and temple (Eph. 2:22) are two examples. Three frequently used metaphors will be examined in some detail.

(a) The Body of Christ

One of the oldest non-biblical statements of faith is the Apostles Creed. Part of this creed reads as follows: "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting." As a child, brought up in a 'Presbyterian' congregation. I often speculated about the word "catholic" in the creed. I wondered how the congregation could believe in something that seemed to pertain to the 'Catholic' denomination when we were Protestants. The answer is of course obvious, catholic in the creed means universal not the Roman Catholic denomination. Christians of all denominations and all ages have realized and accepted the importance and biblical proof for the body of Christ being the universal body of believers and this creed is a reflection of this fact.

We will examine several passages that teach this truth.

Romans 12:5

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Robert Haldane, when commenting of the first half of Ro. 12:5, "So we, being many, are one body", states that; "This is not to be restricted to one church, as to the church at Rome, to which it was written, but refers to the Church of Christ, which embraces His people of all ages, and of all countries."¹⁰⁵

Haldane's position is the orthodox accepted one because this is what this passage clearly teaches.

1 Cor. 12:12-27 teaches the same lesson. Charles Hodge's remarks on verses twelve and thirteen bring this out:

...The apostle had taught the in the unity of the church there is a diversity of gifts. This is illustrated by a reference to the human body. It is one, yet it consists of many members. And this diversity is essential to unity; for unless the body consisted of many members, it would not be a body, i.e. an organic whole. So also is Christ, i.e. the body of Christ, or the Church... Unto one body means so as to constitute one body...No matter how great may have been the previous difference, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, by this baptism of the Spirit, all who experience it are merged into one body; they are intimately and organically united as partaking of the same life. Comp. Gal. 3, 28. And this is the essential point of the analogy between the human body and the church. As the body is one because pervaded and animated by one soul or principle of life, so the church is one because pervaded by one Spirit. And as all parts of the body which partake of the common life belong to the body, so all those in whom the Spirit of God dwells are members of the church which is the body of Christ.¹⁰⁶

All true Christians have the indwelling of the Spirit this is what makes us unique. All who partake of the Spirit make up the body of Christ. Now those in a local assembly are part of this body, but they are clearly not the body referred to in these passages.

Verse 27 of chapter 12 is a parallel passage to Romans 12:5 which we looked at above. It reads as follows: "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." This is almost the same wording and the same thoughts are expressed.

Matthew Henry's comments on this passage reflect those of all orthodox believers.

Here the apostle sums up the argument, and applies this similitude to the church of Christ, concerning which observe, The relation wherein Christians stand to Christ and one another. The church, or whole collective body of Christians, in all ages, is his body. Every Christian is a member of his body, and every other Christian stands related to him as a fellow-member (#1Co 12:27): Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular, or particular members. Each is a member of the body, not the whole body; each stands related to the body as a part of it, and all have a

¹⁰⁵ Haldane, 560

¹⁰⁶ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) 254, 255

*common relation to one another, dependence upon one another, and should have a mutual care and concern. Thus are the members of the natural body, thus should the members of the mystical body be, disposed.*¹⁰⁷

Ephesians 1:22,23

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Here the church and the body of Christ are unequivocally linked together in the closest possible manner. There simply cannot be any confusion as the apostle Paul speaks in the plainest possible manner. The body is the church and the church is what constitutes the body of Christ in this context.

It was noted above in section one that Thayer's Greek - English Lexicon of the New Testament lists the word church in Eph. 1:22 under the universal heading. There can indeed be no other meaning in these two passages. The "church" here means all believers everywhere and the words "his body" has the same meaning.

Ephesians 4: 3-6

Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This is arguably the most important passage on this subject. Paul is of course speaking about Christian unity, primarily the way we relate to other Christians. All true believers, no matter how unrelated they may be in other aspects, share some common characteristics based on their being true Christians. These include the fact that they make up one body with one head. Christ is the master and leader of all, each member makes up a part of one complete whole. Baptism provides a unity of Sacrament introducing us (by outward symbol) and uniting us into this one body. It is impossible to be a member of this body without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who unites us by infusing the very life of God in each member. We all have unity of belief through faith in God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are united by one hope of eternal salvation and are all called to glorify God by our words and actions. No one can be truly saved and not partake of this common unity.

Colossians 1:18

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

That the church is Christ's body is emphatically stated in this verse. Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures brings out the fact that Paul commonly uses this metaphor. This reference also clearly states that the common meaning *ekklesia* (church) when used in this way is of the universal as opposed to the local church.

The head of the body} (h κεφαλη του σωματος). Jesus is first also in the spiritual realm as he is in nature (verses #18-20). Paul is fond of the metaphor of the body (σωμα) for believers of which body Christ is the head (κεφαλη) as seen already in #1Co 11:3; 12:12,27; #Ro 12:5. See further #Col 1:24:2:19; Eph 1:22; 4:2,15; #Eph 5:30. {The church} (της εκκλησιας) Genitive case in explanatory apposition with του σωματος. This is the general sense of εκκλησια, not of a local body, assembly, or organization. Here the contrast is between the realm of nature (τα παντα) in verses #15-17 and the realm of spirit or grace in verses #18-20. A like general sense of εκκλησια occurs in #Eph 1:22; 5:24-32; Heb 12:23.¹⁰⁸

Colossians 1: 24

Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

¹⁰⁷ Henry, Vol. 6, 571

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures (From Ver. 1.00 of The Word Online Bible 1987-2000 Timnathserah Inc. Winterbourne, Ontario, Canada N0B 2V0.)

Here the thought, at least as far as our present inquiry is concerned is the same as that of Eph. 1:22,23 which was examined above. Clearly the meaning here must be of the universal body of believers as Thayer's brings out for both verse 24 and verse 18 of chapter one.

(b) The Kingdom of Heaven (The Kingdom of God)

The term "kingdom of heaven" is used thirty-three times in Matthew's Gospel but no were else. Other terms, which are equivalent, are found in the rest of the New Testament. Sometimes this is the "kingdom of Christ" other times, as in the apostolic letters "the kingdom of God".

I started this chapter with a reference to Matthew 16:18,19. We must return to this passage now as it provides clear teaching with regard to the relationship between the Church and the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 16: 18,19

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

It is hard to imagine any other meaning for either "my church" or "kingdom of heaven" then that of the universal body of believers. As far as I know all commentators take this position. One example, which refers to verse 19, is as follows:

And I will give unto thee, etc. A key is an instrument for opening a door. He that is in possession of it has the power of access, and has a general care and administration of a house. Hence, in the Bible, a key is used as a symbol of superintendence, an emblem of power and authority. See #Isa 22:22; Re 1:18 3:7. The kingdom of heaven here means, doubtless, the church on earth, See Barnes "Mt 3:2". When he says, therefore, he will give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, he means that he will make him the instrument of opening the door of faith to the world—the first to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. This was done, #Ac 2:14-36, 10:1. The "power of the keys" was given to Peter alone solely for this reason; the power of "binding and loosing" on earth was given to the other apostles with him. See #Mt 18:18. The only pre-eminence, then, that Peter had, was the honor of first opening the doors of the gospel to the world.¹⁰⁹

Our Lord gives us an example of the practical outworking of this authority in the 18th chapter of Matthew where the church is clearly a local congregation. .

Matthew 18: 15 - 18

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Local bodies of believers are members of the universal church and in the same way they are part of what makes up the kingdom of God on earth, a part not the whole. The Kingdom of Heaven and similar names refer to the universal church as described above.

Ephesians 2:11-22

The actual phrase kingdom of God or kingdom of Christ, are not used in these verses. The concept of the kingdom, however, forms the foundation upon which Paul builds his argument. Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures brings this out in the comments on Colossians 1:18. "In #Eph 2:11-22 Paul uses various figures for the kingdom of Christ (commonwealth πολιτεία, verse #12, one new man εις ενα καινον ανθρωπον, verse #15, one body εν ενι

¹⁰⁹ Barnes, Barnes New Testament notes. (From version 1.00 of The Word, Online Bible 1987-2000 Timnathserah Inc. Winterbourne, Ontario, Canada NOB 2V0.)

σωματι, verse #16, family of God οικειοι του ψευ, verse #19, building or temple οικοδομη and ναος, verses #20-22). rank."¹¹⁰

In addition, verse 16 also uses the term (sumpolites) or fellowcitizens. What is it to be members of a commonwealth or to be a citizen? I live in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and am therefore a member of that commonwealth. Anyone who does not live within the state is not a member. I am also a citizen of the United States, which again distinguishes me from members of other countries. All true Christians are members of God's kingdom. Only true believers can make this claim yet this very fact makes us all a part of the same whole, one body, one new man, one building etc.

This concept is also found in the Old Testament. One example from many will illustrate this.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the Land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

All believes are united together by a common bound. Christ's law is written in our hearts. We may be the least in the kingdom or the greatest, but if we are truly in the kingdom know the Lord. This fact separates us from all others and makes us members of God's kingdom.

(c) *The Bride of Christ*

Ephesians 5:24- 27

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

As we saw earlier this is one of those passages that clearly refer to the church as the universal body of believers. The concept here is of each believer collectively being prepared as the bride of Christ. When the last elect sinner is saved and brought to heaven the bride will be complete.

2 Corinthians 11:2

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Paul is clearly speaking to members of a particular congregation, those at Corinth, in this passage. Even in this limited context he clearly views the bride as one for he says as a chaste virgin not as chaste virgins.

Many other passages and examples could be given but the truth should be obvious by this time. Our own bodies are made up of many parts. No one would think of calling an ear the body, yet when each part is given its proper place, we have a whole functioning body. No single local church is the church but at the same time each and every real local assembly is important because together they make up one whole unit.

When all the various words and phrases are examined and given due consideration the over welling emphasis of the Bible is upon the universal aspect of all believers rather than the local. This is obvious from both the numbers of passages, from the various figures that the Holy Spirit used, a body, a building, a kingdom etc. and the teaching of these passages. The science of hermeneutics plays an important role here as in all interpretation of scripture. Passages

¹¹⁰ Robertson

that obviously refer to the universal body of believers must be used and interpreted in that way. Once we start changing the rules by forcing these passages to mean something else, we have opened the door to all kinds of error and chaos. Unfortunately, this is exactly what the editors of Searching Together and those who follow their example have done.

5. What the open church teaches about this subject

In 1977 Jon Zens wrote an article titled "The Local Church: The Pillar and Ground of the Truth". As the title suggests he seeks to establish that the local church is of paramount importance. No true Christian would deny that the local church is very important. We must give the local church its proper place in God's kingdom and in our daily life. We must not, however, elevate it to a position that is unscriptural. 1 Timothy 3:15, ("But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."), is a central passage in Jon Zen's argument for the importance of the local church.

When commenting on this passage he states:

What, then, does Paul have in mind when he uses the descriptions "house of God" and "church of the living God"? Obviously, he has in view the visible, local church where "these things" of chapter two and three take place. The apostle is not referring in verse 15 to a "universal" body of Christ taken as a whole, but to specific bodies of believers assembled for gospel purposes, as delineated in Phil. 1:1. And just how has God ordained for the local churches to function in His plan? Paul states emphatically that each local body is the "pillar and ground of the truth".¹¹¹

We examined this passage in section one above where it was clearly shown that Paul is **not** referring to local assemblies in verse 15, each local assembly is not, in and of itself the pillar and ground of the truth. Paul is without question speaking about the universal body of Christ and this distinction is very important.

Jon Zens continues in the next sentence after the quote above in the following way.

In Eph. 3:10, Paul indicates that the "manifold wisdom of God" in bringing Jew and Gentile into one body by Christ's work is made "known by the church". Again, this display is not accomplished by the church "invisible," but by visible manifestations of Christ's body in local assemblies all over the world. The local church, then, is the place where God has ordained for His gospel to be defended and placarded.¹¹²

Here we find yet another example of what orthodox believers accept as a universal reference as was shown before. Again and again Jon Zens proves to be an unfaithful guide on this subject.

Limiting these two passages to a local assembly, as Jon Zens does, is without warrant and any doctrine based on this assumption alone is false. The local church is without question very important, but it is not in and of itself the "pillar and ground of the truth". We are as individuals Americans, but America is not one single individual or even many hundreds of individuals, but all Americas together. Berkhof brought this out in his comments on 1 Tim. 3:15, each local assembly is the pillar and ground of the truth by virtue of its being a part or member of the whole. This is, however, clearly not Zen's meaning. He turns scripture on its end by making the local church preeminent, complete in and of itself apart from the universal Church.

Earlier in the article Jon Zens asks "Does the New Testament lend support to the common idea that the Body of Christ is a 'universal' mass of believers?"¹¹³ He answers this in part as follows:

*In the majority of passages where the word "church" appears, the local church is in view (see E. Radmacher's, *The Nature of the Church*, where he notes that ninety-two out of ninety-seven places where "church" occurs refer to the body as local). Too many Christians have so universalized the body of Christ that they have done injustice to the vast importance attached to the body as localized. In light of this New Testament emphasis, and the widespread neglect of it in many churches and individuals, I plead with you to give diligent attention to the pattern we will now see emerge in scripture.¹¹⁴*

¹¹¹ From a reprint which was taken from the summer 1977 issue of B.R.R., page 6

¹¹² Ibid., 6

¹¹³ Ibid., 2

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 3

A short time later, while examining Matt. 16:18,19 he states that, "The church Christ builds, therefore, is not 'invisible,' or a nebulous universal mass of all believers".¹¹⁵ In the next section he examines different passages from the book of Acts and states, "The 'church', then, is a specific, visible body of believers. It can be 'gathered together'"¹¹⁶ In the words "a specific, visible body of believers" we find an outright denial of the biblical doctrine of the church as the total of all believers. This illustrates a characteristic of Jon Zen's writing. He starts with something that is true in and of its self. He then changes the meaning by the addition of a phrase or sentence. This is the critical part; this seemingly small change moves the teaching from that which is true to that which is false. By using the word "specific" in the above quote Jon changed the meaning from a universal body of believers to a local body. Part of this teaching is based on passages from the book of Acts, which refers to specific local groups of believers. The other part is based on Matt.16: 18, where the reference is to the universal body of believers alone. He makes both refer to the local church alone.

We examined Matthew 16:18, 19 in section one. As we saw it does not support Jon Zen's position. To limit the word 'church' to a specific local group of believers, as Jon Zens repeatedly does, is unbiblical.

He not only misrepresents Bible passages he also gives a false impression with regard to what others have written. At the end of the section titled 'Building of Churches; The Activity of Christ' Jon cites an article by Prof. John Murray.

*The church Christ builds, therefore is not "invisible," or a nebulous universal mass of all believers. It may be "invisible" in the sense that we are humanly limited from seeing all of its world-wide expression, but it is always "visible," for the church consists of those who are an "epistle. . . known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 3:2; see John Murray, "The Church; its Definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid," . . .)*¹¹⁷

Prof. Murray's article deals primarily with the question of the church as visible vs. invisible not as local vs. universal. He does however examine the subject of the universal church where he states:

*The question arises at this point; is there warrant for the use of the term 'church' in the singular to designate the 'churches' in their collective unity? The answer must be in the affirmative. It may be that in Acts 8:3- 'Saul made havoc of the church'- the reference is to the church at Jerusalem (cf. 8:1), but in view of his project to go to Damascus (cf. 9:1, 1), it is likely that 'the church' considered more extensively. There can, however, be no question about the inclusive use in Acts 9:31. 'The church' refers to the whole of Judea and Samaria and Galilee and, therefore, to the churches in these provinces (cf. Gal. 1:22). And when Paul says that 'he persecuted the church of God' (Gal. 1:13;cf.Phil.3:6) it is scarcely possible to think of the church restrictively. The generic reference of the term is patent in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (cf. Eph. 4:11, 12). The various offices and gifts specified cannot be contemplated as bestowed on anything less than the church universal, comprising all the churches of the saints. The parallel passage cited from Ephesians 4 speaks of the perfecting of the saints and the edification of the body of Christ and these must be considered inclusively. Then again, when Paul writes to Timothy and gives him instruction as to behavior 'in the church of the living God' the pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15), it is not simply to a particular church that this behavior is relevant or the predications applicable, but to the whole church and, therefore, to all the churches of God, in this case called 'the church of the living God'*¹¹⁸

Neither Prof. Murray's article nor the Bible passages he appeals to support Jon Zen's teaching, rather they both oppose it.

As I have stated before the concept of local churches is scriptural and is very important. This does not mean that it is the only meaning or even the most important meaning in scripture. The fact that Jon Zen's remarks are so misleading demands that we examine this subject in more detail. First of all the numbers quoted by Jon from, 'The Nature of the Church' are wrong on two accounts. First of all there are over one hundred occurrences of the word church in the New Testament not ninety-seven. (My copy of Strong's lists one hundred sixteen verses using the word Church or Churches.) As we saw in section one Thayer's lists the following passages under section bb (all Christians everywhere). They are Mt. 16:18; 1 Co. 12:28; Eph. 1:22, 3:10, 5:23, 27, 29, 32; Phil. 3:6; Col. 1:18, 24; Gal. 1:13; 1 Co. 15:9, and 1 Tim. 3:15. In addition Heb. 12:23 is listed as all Christians already in heaven. This makes fifteen not five that have a universal meaning.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 3

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 3

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 3

¹¹⁸ John Murray, The Collected Writings of John Murray Vol. 1, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) 233

Secondly Jon refers to the "Body of Christ" not just to the word Church ("Too many Christians have so universalized the body of Christ that they have done injustice to the vast importance attached to the body as localized"). This quote tells us a great deal about Jon's thinking on this subject. We examined various passages that refer to "the body of Christ" in section 4.a above. In each of those passages the body had specific reference to the universal body of believers. It is especially for this reason that the majority of Christians have paid so much attention to this relationship. Jon clearly takes a different path. He believes that there should be a greater emphasis on the body as a local group of believers. He is not alone in this belief and before we examine the scriptures in more detail on this subject, I would like to show how Cliff Bjork deals with this subject.

The 1994 edition of Searching Together, "Hermeneutics: Six essential principles..." was referenced earlier. The last section, which contains the sixth principle, is titled 'The Body'. In harmony with Jon Zen's teaching Cliff Bjork seeks to dismantle the true biblical doctrine of the body of Christ in order to falsely inflate the importance of the local church. The following quotations bear this out:

*A local assembly of believers, therefore, is neither a democracy nor an autocracy.... It is a body! It is a corporate entity; "a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body" (1 Cor. 12:12). More specifically, it is "the body of Christ and each [believer] is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27) ...*¹¹⁹

We must take careful note of the fact that he is specifically referring to "a local assembly of believers". In the next paragraph he goes on to state:

*Before we can discuss how the "body" affects biblical interpretation, however, we need to be certain as to who we are talking about when we speak of "the body of Christ." Most Bible scholars and theologians have taught that it refers primarily to the "catholic" or universal company of God's elect from every age and "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9), and secondarily to a local assembly of believers. While both of these definitions are correct, the fact that greater emphasis is often placed on the universal over the local meaning does not square with the Bible's own use of the expression and only serves to weaken the intended impact of many such references where the "body of Christ" is in view. There are a few passages where the term "body" must be understood in its universal sense (cf. Eph. 3:6), but the great majority of texts where the word "body" is found clearly refer to a local assembly of believers (cf. Rom. 12:4-5 1 Cor. 12:12-27).*¹²⁰

Mr. Bjork admits that his teaching differs from what has been commonly taught. He appeals to these two passages specifically to support his position. As we saw in section 4.a above these passages refer to the universal and not the local church. There is simply no basis for applying them to the local assembly. Why is that Cliff Bjork and Jon Zens appeal to passages that so obviously do not support their position?

In order to answer this question, we will briefly examine the remaining New Testament passages that refer to this subject.

1 Corinthians 10:16,17

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body for we are all partakers of that one bread.

Robertson's New Testament Word Pictures has this to say on verse 17:

*One bread} (εις αρτος). One loaf. {Who are many} (οι πολλοι). The many. {We all} (οι παντες). We the all, the whole number, οι παντες being in apposition with the subject {we} (ημεις unexpressed). {Partake} (μετεχομεν). Have a part with or in, share in. See on "1Co 9:12"; see on "Heb 2:14"; see on "Heb 5:13" (partaking of milk). {Of the one bread} (του ενος αρτου). Of the one loaf, the article του referring to one loaf already mentioned. {One body} (εν σωμα). Here the mystical spiritual body of Christ as in #12:12, the spiritual kingdom or church of which Christ is head (#Col 1:18; #Eph 5:23).*¹²¹

Ephesians 2:16

¹¹⁹ Searching Together, 1994, page 55

¹²⁰ Ibid., 55-56

¹²¹ Robertson

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

Again Robertson's Word Pictures:

And might reconcile} (και αποκαταλλαξη). Final clause with ina understood of first aorist active subjunctive of αποκαταλασσω for which see #Col 1:20,22. {Them both} (τους αμφοτερους). "The both," "the two" (τους δυο), Jew and Gentile. {In one body} (εν ενι σωματι). The "one new man" of verse #15 of which Christ is Head (#1:23), the spiritual church. Paul piles up metaphors to express his idea of the Kingdom of God with Christ as King (the church, the body, the commonwealth of Israel, oneness, one new man in Christ, fellow-citizens, the family of God, the temple of God). {Thereby} (εν αυτω). On the Cross where he slew the enmity (repeated here) between Jew and Gentile.¹²²

Ephesians 4:4

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

Again, Robertson's Word Pictures:

One body} (εν σωμα). One mystical body of Christ (the spiritual church or kingdom, cf. #1:23; 2:16). {One Spirit} (εν πνευμα). One Holy Spirit, grammatical neuter gender (not to be referred to by "it," but by "he"). {In one hope} (εν μια ελπιδι). The same hope as a result of their calling for both Jew and Greek as shown in chapter #2.¹²³

Ephesians 4:12-16

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is) the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 5:23,30

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Colossians 2:18,19

Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful

These last three passages clearly refer to the universal body of believers as well.

Universal passages are appealed to because there are no New Testament references to the body of Christ, as the local body of believers as such. All of the passages cited above have a clear intentional universal application. If there is any application to the local assembly it not that the local assembly is the body of Christ in any sense other than membership in that universal body. The local church is not the body of Christ, it is a part or member of that body not the body its self.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

I recently came across another example of false teaching on this subject. This example comes from the "I believe in" series of books edited by Michael Green. It is called "I Believe in the Church". In a section titled "Complete in Christ" the author states that, "Each individual *ekklesia* (local church, groups of churches, or denomination), is not *the* church, but *fully represents it*."¹²⁴ This would appear to be a dogmatic statement that the local church is not to be considered as being the universal church. Yet in the opening sentence of the next paragraph he states that: "Thus the local church does not merely belong to the universal church as some junior, smaller and greatly inferior part of the whole; the local church is the church and is therefore complete in Christ."¹²⁵ In between these two sentences there are four sentences which complete the first paragraph. No biblical proof is offered yet he asserts, in the strongest terms, the full equality of the local body to the universal in spite of the fact that he also asserts that it is not to be equated with the universal church. This is what he means by the local body fully representing the universal.

Earlier in the same chapter there is a section called "Universal or local?". Here he states that in Ephesians and Colossians Paul's use of the words "the church" are primarily referring to the universal church. He goes on to say that in Romans and Corinthians the meaning is of the local body of believers. Speaking about Paul he says that, "He writes therefore to remind them that they, as a local church, are the body of Christ."¹²⁶ As we have seen there is no biblical basis for such statements.

Even though he knew what the truth of the matter was he was obviously unwilling to abide by this truth as the references given above show. Why this discrepancy? He gives us one possible answer earlier in the book. He states that:

*... The church must learn to be on the move, always relevant for today's world. If it cannot speak in the language and culture of this present generation, whom it has been called to serve, it is tragically out of touch, not only with the world of today but also with the God of today. Of course, God himself never changes, His love and truth endure forever. Yet our understanding of him, and his communication through us, should be changing all the time.*¹²⁷

Truth does not change and consequently what the Bible teaches about the body of Christ cannot change with the changing times. It should be obvious that David Watson is doing another "yes but no routine" here in this quotation. "The God of today" yet "God himself never changes". He wants it both ways, but the Bible only knows one truth, God is the same yesterday today and forever there is no such thing as the "God of today". When we put anything before the truth as it is in Jesus we will end up as he does in hopeless confusion. Simply stating that something is true does not make it true. Unless there is clear biblical proof for a doctrine, we dare not follow those who are teaching it.

¹²⁴ David Watson, I Believe in the Church, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 1978) 110

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 110-111

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 74

The priesthood of all believers, is it a literal priesthood?

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is clearly taught in scripture. The following are some of the most important New Testament passages.

1 Peter 2:5 "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."

1 Peter 2:9 "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:"

Revelation 1:6 "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 5:10 "And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

Revelation 20:6 "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

There can be no debate about the fact of this doctrine, as the passages referenced above demonstrate. The question is just what constitutes this priesthood? Is this office literal or figurative? In other words, is it the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament priesthood or something completely different? Fortunately, the Bible gives us clear guidance on this subject.

As we begin to look at this the following remarks by Robert Haldane while commenting on Romans 15:16, ("That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."), provide the perfect starting point.

*Many of the errors of the Man of Sin arise from considering teachers under the New Testament as successors of the priests under the law. But there is now no priesthood, except in Christ, who abides a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec. The priests under the law of Moses were His types. As He is come, and has engrossed the whole duties of the office to Himself, **He alone possesses priesthood**. There is no longer any need of a typical priesthood; and the great sacrifice has been already offered. When the Apostles are spoken of as doing any part of the priest's office, it is in a figurative sense. It is in the same sense that the altar is spoken of. As there is no sacrifice now to be offered, there is now no altar. To give the Lord's table the name of an altar is very erroneous. It is wonderful to consider how, from the figurative use of a few words in the New Testament and in early Church history, a number of the grossest and most superstitious doctrines and practices, as has been already observed, arose in the Church. The bread of the Lord's table at length became the body of Christ in a literal sense; the table on which it lay became the altar; the teachers became the priests who offered the sacrifice of the mass; and the contributions of Christians became offerings. In all these things, and innumerable others, the figurative sense has been, by a gross imagination and the artifice of Satan, turned into a literal sense, to the utter subversion of truth.¹²⁸*

Notice in particular Haldane's remark that Christ "alone possesses priesthood". I believe that this is the central issue here. If Christians are in any sense **literal** priests then Christ is not alone in His priesthood. There are only two possible choices here, Christ alone or Christ plus our works. If we are literal priests making up a literal priesthood then we must of necessity have **real work as priests** to do. This would mean that the Christ's work and office was lacking in some way.

John Owen, the great Puritan theologian, dealt with this subject in some detail. Volume 13 of the sixteen-volume set of his works contains an article titled "The duty of pastors and people distinguished". He deals with this question of a literal vs. figural New Testament priesthood in chapter three where he states:

¹²⁸ Haldane, 619, 620 (emphasis mine)

4. *That whosoever maintaineth any priests of the New Testament as properly so called, in relation to any altar or sacrifice by them to be offered, doth as much as is in him lieth disannul the covenant of grace, and is blasphemously injurious to the priesthood of Christ. The priest and the sacrifice under the New Testament are one and the same; and therefore, they who make themselves priests must also make themselves Christ's, or get another sacrifice of their own.*¹²⁹

Before we continue with this quote, I want to examine what he is saying. The New Testament knows of no literal, real priesthood apart from sacrifice. The two go together. If we are priests in any real sense, we must have real sacrifices to offer. To believe in any form of literal priesthood by anyone other than Christ himself is to destroy Christ and His finished work. This is indeed a very serious matter. He goes on to elaborate on this and to offer scriptural proof of this position.

*As there is but "one God," so there is but "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus," 1 Tim. 2:5. Now, he became the mediator of the New Testament chiefly by his priesthood, because "through the eternal Spirit he offered himself to God," Heb. 9: 14, 15. Neither is any now called of God to be a priest, as was Aaron; and without such divine vocation to this office no one ought to undertake it, as the apostle argues, Heb. 5:4. Now, the end of any such vocation and office is quite ceased, being nothing but to "offer gifts and sacrifices" unto God, Heb. 8:3: for Christ hath offered one sacrifice for sins forever, and is "set down at the right hand of God," chap. 10:12; yea, "by one offering he hath perfected them that are sanctified," verse 14; and if that did not procure remission of sins, there must be "no more offering for sin," verse 18; and the surrogation of another makes the blood of Christ, to be no better than that of bulls and goats.*¹³⁰

Owen is stating that the primary function of the priesthood is to offer gifts and sacrifices to God. Christ by His person and work has once and for all completed these duties just as He completely fulfilled the law. There is no longer any need for the priesthood as a real functioning entity. To insist on a functioning priesthood is to deny the finished work of Christ.¹³¹ He next refers to the Roman Catholic priesthood in particular and then states: "Concerning them and ours, we may shut up this discourse with what the apostle intimates to the Hebrews, - namely, that all priests are ceased who were mortal".¹³² In other words there is no longer a functioning literal priesthood in the New Testament, other than Christ's.

Historically the Roman Catholic Church has been in the forefront of this debate due to their practices. It is a sad fact that many Protestants are now abandoning the true doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in favor of one almost as bad as the Roman Catholic position. As we shall see the editors of Searching Together are in the forefront of this effort.

Jon Zens in an article titled "Building up the Body - One Man or One Another?" points out four things about the general priesthood of all believers. He states that "a functioning priesthood is essential and basic to the people of God", that this priesthood is so fundamental and important that any church activity or practice that hinders the believers acting as priests must be rejected, that only the people not the place has any importance and that the clergy/laity distinction must be eliminated.¹³³

The priesthood of all believers forms one of the foundations upon which Jon Zens and others like him erect their teaching of a one-class church. This is really the purpose of the "Building up the Body" article. Another example is Jon Zens's use of W. Carl Ketcherside's work "The Royal Priesthood", which was referenced above. In the Searching Together version, under the heading "The Time of Reformation", we read the following:

*Nothing is clearer than the fact that God's purpose was to make ministry and priesthood co-extensive in "the time of reformation." Every person who accepted the good tidings was to be a priest, every such person was to be a minister...In priesthood and ministry all were to be of equal rank, insofar as liberty, privilege and relationship to God are concerned. God's people were no longer to be a kingdom with priests, but a kingdom of priests; they were not to be a congregation with ministers, but a congregation of ministers....*¹³⁴

¹²⁹ John Owen, The Works of John Owen Vol. 13, (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968) 26

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26

¹³¹ Hebrews 10:10; "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

¹³² Owen, 27

¹³³ Baptist Reformation Review, Second Quarter 1981, Vol. 10:2, page 11

¹³⁴ Winter 1999, page 6

As we saw in an earlier section Mr. Ketcherside believes that the Old Testament priesthood is intimately connected with what he calls the "priesthood of all believes" today. This can be clearly seen in the quote from Jon Zens's article above. Note the emphasis on "a functioning priesthood". Note also the prominence that Jon Zens gives to Ketcherside and his teaching. In both cases they can only mean a literal, i.e. not figurative, priesthood. As we have seen this shows a gross denial of the teaching found in the epistle of the Hebrews. It involves Christ plus our works not Christ alone. In other words, this teaching goes against the heart of the Gospel of God: Christ and His finished work alone is the basis salvation in every phase. That is not to rule out our works but that our works are not needed to make up something that was lacking in the great work of Jesus Christ.

An article by Robert C. Girard in the third quarter 1981 edition of *Searching Together* is even more specific. This is really one chapter from a book by Mr. Girard titled "Brethren, Hang Together". In the editor's note to this article Jon Zens states that "I believe Mr. Girard's article opens up avenues of truth that are of vital importance to our Christian experience".¹³⁵ This is a very strong endorsement of Mr. Girard's views.

Mr. Girard addresses the question of who the priests of Christ are and what authority they have in the following remarks.

*In the New Testament, every person who receives Jesus Christ and acknowledges Him as Lord is given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), is called to a special vocation in life (Eph. 4:1) [in a editor's note here Jon Zens clarifies this one point], equipped by the gifts of the Spirit for ministry (Rom. 12:4-8) and thus **ordained** a full-fledged ministering priest in the Church of God (1 Pet. 2:5,9). When the Holy Spirit baptizes a person into the body of Christ, whether hands are laid on him or not, that spiritual baptism into the body is an "official" ordination ceremony. The High Priest is Jesus Christ. **All**, believers comprise His "royal priesthood". . . The office of believer-priest carries authority with it - the authority of Christ Himself.¹³⁶*

A short time later he states:

No professional or team of professionals has been ordained, who is able to reveal Christ alive in the world. To no less than a functioning royal priesthood, utilizing the unique ministry of every truly born-again believer, has the full revelation of Jesus Christ been committed.¹³⁷

And again:

The church's function is to be an environment in which every believer is provided the opportunity, the encouragement, and the freedom to be, in his own peculiar way, a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ a priest among priests, offering spiritual sacrifices to God and bringing God into focus for people.¹³⁸

These remarks leave us with absolute certainty that a fully functional real priesthood is in view. He views this as an official office occupied by every single believer. This office, according to Girard holds real power in the form of authority from Christ.

Before further comment one point needs to be examined. He specifically refers to the priesthood as a "royal priesthood" offering "spiritual sacrifices". John Owen has this to say on the subject of the royal vs. the ritual priesthood:

*All faithful ministers of the gospel, inasmuch as they are in-grafted into Christ and are true believers, **may**, as all other true Christians, **be called priests**; but this inasmuch as they are members of Christ, not ministers of the gospel. It respecteth their persons, not their function, or not them as such. Now, I conceive it may give some light to this discourse if we consider the grounds and reasons of this metaphorical appellation, in divers places of the gospel ascribed to the worshipers of Christ (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9, etc) and how the analogy which the present dispensation holds with what was established under the administration of the Old Testament may take place; for there we find the Lord thus bespeaking his people, "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," Exod. 19:6: so that it should seem that there was then a twofold priesthood; - a **ritual** priesthood, conferred upon the tribe of Levi; and a **royal** priesthood, belonging to the whole people. The first is quite abrogated and swallowed up in the priesthood of Christ; the other is put over unto us under the gospel, being ascribed to them and us, and everyone*

¹³⁵ page 31

¹³⁶ pages 34,35 (emphasis his)

¹³⁷ page 35

¹³⁸ page 36

*in covenant with God. Not **directly** and properly, as denoting the function peculiarly so called, but **comparatively**, with reference had to them that are without: for as those who were properly called priests had a nearer access unto God than the rest of the people, especially in his solemn worship, so all the people that are in covenant with God have such an approximation unto him by virtue thereof, in comparison of them that are without, that in respect thereof they are said to be priests. ...Their approaching nigh unto God made them all a nation of priests, in comparison of those "dogs" and unclean Gentiles that were out of the covenant. Now, this prerogative is often appropriated to the faithful in the New Testament:*¹³⁹

Owen's remarks are in direct contradiction to those of Girard. We are not priests because of our ministry, we are not priests in any real, ordained way, but only by our association to Christ in comparison to those outside of Christ. No matter how we define it (royal or ritual) there can be no literal functioning New Testament priesthood because of the reasons outlined above. Jon Zens, Robert C. Girard and anyone else who proclaims a functioning New Testament Priesthood is in opposition to what the Bible teaches. They take that which is figurative and turn it into something concrete thus perverting the truth.

Robert Haldane in the quotation at the beginning of this section stated that " As there is no sacrifice now to be offered, there is now no altar." John Owen in the quotations given above brings out the point that sacrifices and priesthood must go together. A real priesthood must have real sacrifices or it is not a real priesthood. Girard, in the last quotation given above, states clearly his position on this. He believes that real sacrifices are offered and that this service is done for others not just of the individual "priest" himself. John Owen shows the falsehood of this position in the following remarks. After showing what these sacrifices are, he goes on to say:

*Now, these and sundry other services acceptable to God, receiving this appellation in scripture, denominate the performers of them priests. Now, here it must be observed, that these afore-named holy duties are called "sacrifices," not properly, but metaphorically only - not in regard of the external acts, as were those under the law, but in regard of the internal purity of heart from whence they proceed. ... we are made priest, not having authority in our own names to go unto God for **others**, but having liberty, through him, and in his name, to go unto God for **ourselves**.*¹⁴⁰

There is no more need for literal sacrifices just as there is no longer a need for a real priesthood. We have the individual freedom in Christ, because of His person and work, to draw near unto God without the need for any other mediator.

One final quote from John Owen would not be out of place:

*We are priests as we are Christians, or **partakers of a holy unction**, whereby we are anointed to the participation of all Christ's glorious offices. We are not called Christians for nothing. If truly we are so, then have we an "unction from the Holy One," whereby we "know all things," 1 John 2:20. And thus also were all God's people under the old covenant, when God gave that caution concerning them, "Touch not my CHRISTIANS, (editor's note, Owen here alludes to the meaning of the name, as derived from Christ - "the anointed") and do my prophets no harm," Ps. 105:15. The unction, then, of the Holy Spirit implies a participation of all those endowments which were typified by the anointing with oil in the Old Testament, and invests us with the privileges, anointed, - to wit, of kings, priests, and prophets: so that by being made Christians (everyone is not so that bears that name), we are engrafted into Christ, and do attain to a kind of holy and intimate communion with him in all his glorious offices; and in that regard are called priests.*¹⁴¹

Christ is the beginning and the ending; to Him belong glory and honor. His is a finished work, complete and perfect in every respect.

Much more could be said under the present heading but it should be obvious that the Bible knows of no literal functioning New Testament priesthood other than the finished work of Jesus Christ.

¹³⁹ Owen, 21 emphasis his

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 24 emphasis his

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 23

Conclusion

Why do we meet together as Christians? I am speaking here primarily of the weekly meeting though the same question could be asked of any time that Christians meet together. I have lived in many different countries since my conversion to Christ in 1971. Do to this fact and various other factors I have witnessed firsthand the gathering together of Christians in many settings in different lands. From the time of my conversion I was deeply impressed by the significance of this basic question. What should our motivation be when we gather together as Christians? One of my first memories as a very young Christian was of the gathering of a major Christian denomination in the Austrian alps. I had only been saved for a month or so and was deeply impressed by the opportunity of being present at this major event. I listened to the speakers that first day with great interest. After the speakers were finished, we had a time of 'fellowship' together and again I tried to make the most of the opportunity given to me. Much to my dismay I found that the leaders who had spoken so effectively presented a different picture by the way they lived. Even in that brief time it was clear that their lives did not match their words. This left a lasting impression that is still with me today. Later when I left the Army and settled in Cape Town, South Africa I had a similar experience, this time in a major Baptist Church. The pastor was a godly man who had a deep regard for God's word. The problem was that many members of the congregation and even some of the elders were not saved. At one point the pastor preached a series of sermons on 1 John. One message in particular is burned into my memory. He spoke on 1 John 1:3. His whole emphasis was on believers having fellowship with each other. As I read the passage to myself the Holy Spirit opened up the true significance of this verse to me. The problem in this church was not a lack of fellowship between members, it was a lack of fellowship with God. If our motive for meeting together is **anything** less than drawing closer to God and worshiping Him alone through Christ in the Holy Spirit we will fail. This motive, God's glory, must provide our primary reason for gathering and form the foundation upon which we meet. This is not a question of personal taste or desire. It is a God given command (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Needless to say, the advocates of the 'open Church' claim this as their motive. Yet, as we have seen, the methods they imply stress the outward aspects of worship, not the inward. They would have us obey what they see as the letter of the law. One example that comes to mind is the matter of mass participation as opposed to one or two men leading. Another example is Rutz's definition of what worship is. He defines worship "in the strictest sense" as "praise and veneration conceived and spoken by individuals."¹⁴² This implies that **worship must be vocal**, again the outward aspect rather than the inward. Other examples have been examined above. I am not saying that such matters are of no importance but the fact is that they are at best secondary issues. When we live our lives openly before God, aware that He sees and knows our inmost thoughts, longing only for His glory, many of these lesser matters will work themselves out. Seek first His kingdom. That kingdom is spiritual and those who belong to it must worship in spirit and in truth.

How should this effect our weekly meeting? If God is truly the center of our weekly meeting then worshiping Him should be the focal point of our meeting. Simply put worship toward God is the act of acknowledging Him, as he deserves, with deep respect and reverence. Worship is of course both private and corporate, either way God must come first. If the president of the United States paid us a personal visit how would we treat him? To say the least, we would be very foolish indeed if we did not show him the respect that is his due as the leader of our country. When I was in Malawi, a beautiful African country, one was required to stop and pay due respect if the president of that country drove by. To not do so would be a great insult and could result in you're leaving the country in a hurry. If we must pay respect to our earthly leaders who are but men how should we act toward God? When Christians gather together on Sunday this meeting is often called the 'worship service'. Every Christian meeting should contain at least an element of worship but at the main weekly meeting this should be the primary focus. The important matter here is not so much what we do outwardly but what we feel and experience inwardly. I touched on this matter earlier but we need to be reminded of this constantly. Remember Christ's words to the scribes and Pharisees of His time.

*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*¹⁴³

¹⁴² Rutz, 16

¹⁴³ Matthew 23:23-26

We are in danger today from those within as well as from those without. Beware of false teacher and false teaching. Bring each doctrine to the touchstone of the Bible. I hope and pray that God will be pleased to use this effort to help us to better glorify His precious name by bring truth to light.