

What Will

You Do

With God's

Church?

In spite of the fact that most Christian denominations, and sects, claim to follow the Bible, it only takes a cursory scan of the Scriptures to see that modern “Churches” and “Assemblies” have little in common with the Church Epistles written by Paul.

If “the Bible is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice”, as so many doctrinal statements claim, why is there such a difference between what we read and what we see?

Take, for instance the following examples:

The Church Building

Nowhere in the Bible do we see the Church meeting in a building built solely for worship services or to hear a sermon preached.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215) is the first person to use the phrase ‘go to church’ ---which was a foreign thought to the first century believers. (You cannot go to something you are!)” (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity pg 12)

Since the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, all believers have become the temple of God.

“When Christianity was born, it was the only religion on earth that had no sacred objects, no sacred persons, and no sacred spaces. Although surrounded by Jewish synagogues and pagan temples, the early Christians were the only religious people on earth that did not erect sacred buildings for their worship. The Christian faith was born in homes, out in courtyards, along roadsides, and in living rooms.” (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity pg 14)

“In the first three centuries, the church had no buildings. . .” (A.T. Robertson in the Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine, p. 166)

“The Christianity that conquered the Roman Empire was essentially a home-centered movement. It was a conscious choice on their part.” (Robert Banks, The Church Comes Home)

Church buildings began with Constantine. Shortly after becoming the Emperor of the entire Roman Empire he began ordering the construction of church buildings. He did so to promote the popularity and acceptance of Christianity. From things that I have read in the past, I understand that during the time of Constantine, and before, Christians were, by many, considered to be atheists. This is because they had no buildings in which to house their God. So, because Constantine had adopted the belief of special objects and places from the pagans, he decided that if the Christians had their own sacred buildings, like the pagans did, their religion would be regarded as valid.

The church building brought significant changes to Christian worship. Instead of keeping with the Biblical view of the Church as a family; older men viewed and fathers, older women as mothers, younger men and women as brothers and sisters; it quickly became an organization of pomp and ceremony, similar to the pagan temples around them.

Along with the buildings came the pagan idea of the priesthood. This too, came from paganism, not Judaism as many Christians believe. For evidence of this, I recommend the book, “The Two Babylons” by Alexander Hislop.

The Order of Worship

Regardless of what so-called church you look at, i.e. Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Church of Christ, Pentecostal, Lutheran, or a member of any other Protestant denomination, the Order of Worship, except for some minor differences, is just about the same in each case:

- The Greeting Prayer or Scripture Reading
- The “Worship” Service
- The Announcements
- The Offering
- The Sermon
- One or more of the following: altar call, more singing, Communion, or prayer
- Closing Announcements
- The Benediction

With some minor rearrangements, almost all Protestants around the world observe this liturgy week after week.

Where did the Protestant Order of Worship come from?

“It has its basic roots in the Catholic Mass”. (Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church: Volume 3, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1910, p. 505).

“The Catholic Mass did not originate with the New Testament, but instead, grew out of ancient Judaism and paganism”. (Frank Senn, Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, p. 54)

Historian Will Durant points out that *“the Mass was deeply steeped in pagan magical thinking as well as Greek drama”.* (Will Durant, The Age of Faith, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950, pp 521-524.)

“The Catholic Mass that emerged in the sixth century was fundamentally pagan. Christians incorporated the vestments of the pagan priests, the use of incense and holy water in purification rites, the burning of candles in worship, the architecture of the Roman basilica for their church buildings, the law of Rome as the basis of ‘canon law,’ the title Pontifex Maximus for the head bishop, and the pagan rituals for the Catholic Mass.” (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity pg 52)

When Luther launched the Reformation in 1520, he railed against the Catholic Mass. The altar for the Mass and the Eucharist was the central focus of the Catholic service. But instead of turning the Church back to the Bible practices all Luther really did was change the pinnacle of the “Church” service from the altar to the pulpit when he made the sermon the emphasis and reason for gathering. Read his words:

“A Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God’s Word and prayer, no matter how briefly”. . . “The preaching and teaching of God’s Word is the most important part of Divine service.” (“The German Mass” from Luther’s Works, LIII, pp. 11 and 68, correspondingly.)

Even though the Christian church today agrees with Luther’s belief in the centrality of preaching, as Frank Viola points out, *“today’s sermon has no root in Scripture.”* (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity pg 86)

Luther’s liturgy varied little from the Catholic Mass, and in the end was nothing more than an abridged version of it. *Under Luther’s influence, the Protestant pastor simply replaced the Catholic priest.* (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity pg 56)

“One further practice that the Reformers retained from the Mass was the practice of the clergy walking to their allotted seats at the beginning of the service while the people stood singing. This practice started in the fourth century when the bishops walked into their magnificent basilica churches. It was a practice copied straight from the pagan imperial court ceremony. When the Roman magistrates entered into the court room, the people would stand singing. This practice is still observed today in many Protestant churches.” (Frank Viola Pagan Christianity p 60)

When comparing this order of worship to what we find in 1 Corinthians 14, it is easy to see that the modern Church does not believe “the Bible is the final authority on all matters of faith and practice”.

In 1 Corinthians 14 we see that everyone had opportunity to share with the Church, that which the Lord had shared with them, with the one condition being that it was all to be for edification.

*What, then, does this mean, brothers? When you gather, everyone has a psalm, teaching, revelation, other language, or interpretation. Everything must be done for upbuilding.
1 Corinthians 14:26 ISV*

So, unless they can find a version of the Bible that legitimately replaces ‘everyone’ to ‘every Pastor’, the modern Church ought to give up their unbiblical practice or their claim to biblical authority for doing what they do.

The Sermon

As much as Christians seem to require music to feel like they’ve gone to Church, to go without a Sermon, would be considered blasphemous and not “Church” at all. The Sermon is the heart of the modern Church service. But the sermon actually destroys the very purpose for which God intended the Church gathering. Frank Viola explains how in his book Pagan Christianity:

“The modern Christian sermon has the following features:

- *It is a regular occurrence – delivered faithfully from the pulpit at least once a week*
- *It is delivered by the same person – typically the pastor*
- *It is delivered to a passive audience; it is essentially a monologue*
- *It is a cultivated form of speech, possessing a specific structure. It typically contains an introduction, three to five points, and a conclusion.*

However, as Frank Viola points out, the kind of preaching mentioned in the Bible we see that it contained the following characteristics:

- *Active participation and interruptions by the audience were common*
- *They spoke extemporaneously and out of a present burden, rather than from a set script.*
- *It was most often dialogical rather than monological*

So, if the so-called Christian Sermon didn’t come from the Bible, then where did the so-called Christian Sermon come from?

The Christian sermon was taken directly out of the pagan of Greek culture! In the fifth century B.C. a group of teachers called sophists invented something called rhetoric which is the art of persuasive speaking.

“They (the sophists) recruited disciples and demanded payment for delivering their orations. The sophists were expert debaters. They were masters at using emotional appeals, physical appearance, and clever language to ‘sell’ their arguments” (Frank Viola Pagan Christianity p 89)

In time, many pagan orators became Christians and with them came their pagan philosophical ideas; slowly at first, but eventually these ideas infiltrated the Christian community. And, unfortunately, the fact that they prized oratorical skill more than accuracy is something that has been adopted in the modern Church, too!

"Thus the pagan notion of a trained professional speaker who delivers orations for a fee moved straight into the Christian bloodstream." (Frank Viola Pagan Christianity pg 91)

As the Church became more of an organization and less of an organism, there came a gradual restriction of the freedom of addressing the Church, to the official class of Priests and Pastors. Eventually, only those who were trained were allowed to address the assembly and the clergy-laity distinction began. This is what the Lord refers to as Nicolaitanism – a system which our Lord said He hates! (Revelation 2.6)

In case you think this is only in the 'High' Churches, such as the Anglican and Presbyterian types, I have ran into this in 'Low' Baptists Churches too, where the laity could preach/teach in the Adult Sunday School or evening services, however, the 11 o'clock slot was reserved for the Seminary trained professional. And, even among those who call themselves "Assemblies", you will find that there is a clear hierarchy between the 'Full Time Workers' and those who are not 'Full Time' even though neither are seminarians.

"In a word, the Greco-Roman sermon replaced prophesying, open sharing, and Spirit-inspired teaching." (Frank Viola Pagan Christianity pg 92)

It was as early as the third century, when Christians started calling their sermons by the same name that Greek orators called their monologues - homilies. Now, there are seminary courses called Homiletics where well meaning young men can pay large amounts of money to learn how to preach in this pagan tradition.

Sermonizing (a word a preacher I know among a branch of Plymouth Brethren swears he doesn't do – but does) absolutely destroys the purpose of the Church gathering because it is a one-way affair. The preacher is separated from the congregation by space. He is seated apart from the congregation. His pulpit is elevated above the passive people in the pews. No one is allowed to ask questions. So, instead of the congregation being actively involved in a discussion with the gifted teacher, like it was when Paul dialogued with the believers (Acts 20 v7), it sits dutifully, ignoring the Holy Spirit, burying His promptings and the gifts that He's given, consequently stunting spiritual growth, in order to keep the status quo.

Clement of Alexandria pointed out the fact that sermons did so little to change Christians. The reason for this is that it was never the means ordained by God to cause growth. Submission to Christ and a quiet heart tuned to hear the Spirit speaking through the Word of God – that is the means to growth!

In addition, the sermon makes the preacher the religious professional and caters to the unbiblical role of the clergy.

"How can a Christian passively sit in a pew and affirm the priesthood of all believers when he is passively sitting in a pew!?" How can a Protestant Christian claim sola Scriptura ('by the Scripture only') and still support the pulpit Sermon?" (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity, pg 102)

The Pastor

The Pastor is the essential figure of almost all modern Churches with the exception of the Plymouth Brethren, however, the Plymouth Brethren have a team of Elders who often fulfill the same unbiblical role.

"Remove the Pastor and modern Christianity collapses. Remove the Pastor and virtually every Protestant church would be thrown into a panic. Remove the Pastor and Protestantism as we know it dies. The Pastor is the

dominating focal point, mainstay, and centerpiece of the modern Church. He is the embodiment of Protestant Christianity.” (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity, pg 106)

The word “Pastors” does appear in the New Testament;

And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as PASTORS and teachers. (Ephesians 4:11 NASB)

In the Greek, the word translated Pastor is the same word for shepherd. It is essentially a figure of speech to describe a particular function in the Church. It is not an office or a title used in a local gathering of Christians. Shepherds are those who naturally provide love and care for God’s sheep. A man who has to go to school to learn how to love and care for God’s people is not, I repeat, NOT, a biblical shepherd. It is either God loving His people through the pastor naturally or it is a man feigning love for the Christians in order to collect a pay check. It is never both and unfortunately, too many so-called pastors would give up their ‘job’ in a heartbeat if the money stopped coming in.

In the wilderness, the Israelites wanted Moses to be the physical mediator between them and God.

At the time of Samuel, Israel demanded a king, even though God wanted His people to live under His direct Headship.

Just as all ancient pagan cultures were hierarchical in their social make-up in varying degrees, God’s people sought the same. Not only in Judaism but in Christianity too.

Up until the second century, the church had no official leadership. They were religious groups without priest, temple, or sacrifice. Christ was their Leader. The elders were older men who guided the believers in a way similar to a father in his home. They weren’t over the Church nor did they seek to control them. These elders simply kept a loving eye upon God’s people seeking to guide them as necessary, trying to keep them focused on Christ and walking according to God’s Word.

Ignatius of Antioch was the first one to lead the way to a one man system. Ignatius elevated one of the elders above all the others and called him “the bishop.” According to Ignatius, the bishop has ultimate power and should be obeyed absolutely.

Consider the following excerpts from his letters:

“All of you follow the bishop as Jesus Christ follows the Father. . . No one is to do any church business without the bishop. . . Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be. . . You yourselves must never act independently of your bishop and clergy. You should look on your bishop as a type of the Father. . . Whatever he approves, that is pleasing to God. (see Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers pp 75-130)

Although this structure didn’t catch on in most areas during Ignatius’ time, by the third century it was in place everywhere.

Elders naturally emerged in a group of believers through the process of time. They were not appointed to an external office. Instead, they were recognized because of their seniority and involvement to the group. But there are only three passages in the New Testament that tell us that elders were publicly recognized; in the “churches” in Galatia, the elders in Ephesus, and the “churches” in Crete.

The word ‘ordain’ in these passages does not mean ‘to place in, or appoint to, an office.’ It, instead, carries the idea of pointing out and affirming what has already evident to the Church.

In like fashion, workers being sent out to evangelize, the laying on of hands was done by apostolic workers. This merely meant the backing or confirmation of a function, not the appointment to an office or the giving of special position, as it came to mean in the late second and early third centuries when "ordination" took on an entirely different meaning.

"By the fourth century, the ceremony of ordination was embellished by symbolic garments and solemn ritual. Ordination produced an ecclesiastical caste that usurped the believing priesthood. From where do you suppose the Christians got their pattern of ordination? They patterned their ordination ceremony after the Roman custom of appointing men to civil office. The entire process down to the very words came straight from the Roman civic world." (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity, pp 124-125)

The unscriptural clergy/laity split has done more harm to the Body of Christ than most can imagine. It has destroyed the doctrine of the priesthood of believers. It has caused men and women to disobey the Holy Spirit and ignore the means by which He reveals Himself to the Church and to the world. Therefore, Christians are not growing; the Church is worldly and powerless. Believers are more dependant on the clergy than they are on Christ. Biblical knowledge is almost non-existent among the so-called laity because they have believed the lie that the pastor is somehow chosen for a position of closeness to God which others are not.

"The modern Pastor not only does damage to God's people, he does damage to himself. The pastoral office has a way of chewing up all who come within its pale. Depression, burn-out, stress, and emotional breakdown are terribly high among Pastors. At the time of this writing, there are reportedly more than 500,000 Pastors serving churches in the U.S. Of this mass number, consider the following statistics that lay bare the lethal danger of the pastoral office:

- 94% feel pressured to have an ideal family
- 90 % work more than 46 hours a week
- 81% say they have insufficient time with their spouses
- 80% believe that pastoral ministry affects their family negatively
- 70% do not have someone they consider a close friend.
- 70% have lower self-esteem than when they entered the ministry
- 50% feel unable to meet the needs of the job.
- 80% are discouraged or deal with depression
- 40%+ report that they are suffering from burnout, frantic schedules, and unrealistic expectations.
- 33% consider pastoral ministry an outright hazard to the family
- 33% have seriously considered leaving their position in the past year.
- 40% of pastoral resignations are due to burnout.

"Most Pastors are expected to juggle 16 major tasks at once. And most crumble under the pressure. For this reason, 1,400 ministers in all denominations across the U.S. are fired or forced to resign each month. Over the past 20 years, the average length of a pastorate has declined from seven years to just over four years." (Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity, pgs 137-138)

The modern Pastor does not have a strand of Scripture to support his existence. During the Reformation, the Catholic priest was transformed into the "preacher," the "Minister," and finally "the Pastor."

The "Pastor" is a pagan tradition that has no basis in Scripture.

The Lord's Supper

The practice of communion (the Lord's Supper) today has become shrouded, as it were, in a cloud of dread and sadness. Many who attend church and partake in communion can attest to the fact that it is a very sombre

time. A time when the emblems (the loaf and the cup) are set out on the table, are blessed, and very somberly given out. It can almost feel as if a funeral is taking place.

But is this the method in which Christ wanted us to partake of the Lord's Supper? In fact is the practice of taking a sip of juice or wine and a small piece of bread correct? Did God in his directions that He gave us, plan something even greater?

In Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22 we can read of the instructions Jesus gave his disciples about the Lord's Supper. The initiation happened during the Jewish Passover, and from that Jesus took a cup and a loaf and began the practice that we still are to follow today with the cup and the loaf.

The term breaking bread, was a common one used in the Bible to describe a meal that was being eaten (Luke 24.35), yet as the Church developed the phrase seemed to become synonymous with the Lord's Supper. In Acts chapter 2.42, we read that one reason the Christians came together was for the fellowship of breaking bread, or to have a meal. In verse 46 they were doing it with glad and generous hearts. They were enjoying their fellowship together and it was noticeable. When we get to Acts chapter 20 and verse 7 we see them gathering together at the beginning of the week for the purpose of breaking bread. So they came together for the purpose of having a meal together.

When we get to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 vv 17-34 we see Paul bring up the Lord's Supper. He starts off showing his disapproval for the way they were operating. In verse 17 he shares with them that he is not happy because of their divisions (v.18). As a result, when they do come together they are not coming for the Lord's Supper, because they are not sharing the food, but eating it as if they are all having their own supper (v. 21). In doing so, they were despising the body of the Lord, the Lord's people (v.22). It is important to realize that Paul does not speak harshly to them for bringing food to the Lord's Supper, but instead speaks harshly for bringing the food and eating it on their own, leaving some hungry. So we see here that they are not performing the Lord's Supper as Paul had taught them because they are eating and leaving some hungry. If you recall Acts chapter 2 v42, you will remember that they came together for the fellowship of breaking bread, or having a meal. So you see here now Paul makes it clear that the fellowship that the Christians would have been having in Acts 2 was not simply a meal together, but was more significant, it was a meal of fellowship, which was also called the Lord's supper, as Paul called it that here in 1 Corinthians 11. In Acts 2, they were eating happily because they were in fellowship together, and no one was going without. But now in Corinth, that is no longer happening. They are eating in such a way that some are going hungry; the fellowship is now gone.

He then refreshes the Christian's memory of the initial giving of the bread and wine. He reminds them that they are symbols of the death of Christ (v.26), and that they were given as a remembrance of Jesus Christ. Paul removes the focus from themselves, which is what the Christians were focused on based off verse 21, and put it back to where it belongs, on Christ.

With this Paul then tells them that if they are to take part of the emblems set forth, and not remember their fellow believers (v.29) they are reaping punishment upon themselves. Paul then concludes the chapter, not telling them to discard the bringing of food, or to just eat a small morsel of bread and a sip of wine, but to instead wait for one another (v.33) and if anyone is too hungry to do so then to eat at home (v.34). Basically if you are so hungry that you are going to show disgrace upon the Body of Christ, then eat at home first before you come, and then partake of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was not an opportunity to be a glutton and neglect the poorer Christian but was instead a time of fellowship with Christians (Acts 2:42), and a time to remember the Lord (1 Corinthians 11.25)

The importance of the meal is quite significant, and to ignore the terms such as "breaking of bread" and "Lord's Supper" for what the words really mean which is a meal, we are doing a great disservice to our communion, and not following the plan set forth by Christ as closely as we ought to be.

The act of having a meal is significant in the fact that in Matthew 26:29, when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, with the Passover meal, He instructed them that He would not partake of the emblems until He drank it with His disciples in His Father's kingdom. We read of this again in Revelations 19:9 when the angel could say: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb..." Christ is not going to partake of the supper until a coming day when we are in heaven, and what is it going to be like? It's going to be called the marriage supper. It's not going to be a celebration of a small snack, but a supper. The word in Revelation 19.9 means a feast or a large meal, similar to a supper that we may have today. The same word is used by Paul too in 1 Corinthians 1.:20, which is something we should not miss.

Our Lord's Supper should never be performed in such a way that it feels like a funeral. With all of our heads bowed, with sad looks upon our face. We often, when thinking upon the Lord's death become sombre, but why? His death has provided life! Because of His death, and resurrection we now truly live; how joyous that truly is. Not just that, but as we have mentioned already in Matthew 26, Christ instructed us that a day is coming when He will partake of the communion with us. How happy that should make us, and compel us to look forward with joy to the day when we will set with Him at the marriage supper of the lamb.

It is very important though to emphasize the significance of fellowship. Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 10 of the importance of the cup and bread and the fact that it symbolized our fellowship, one with another. In vv 15 to 17, Paul brings up the cup and bread again, and brings it back to the fact that it is a reminder of Jesus Christ, but in verse 17 Paul makes it clear, that the one bread is an example of us Christians as one body. We are united. Our fellowship together of these things is to not only remember Christ, but to also show our fellowship. That is why Paul speaks so harshly to them in 1 Corinthians 11 about their lack of care for one another, and once again raises the cup and loaf. It is to be a symbol of unity and fellowship with one another. That is why within the breaking of bread/Lord's Supper (words meaning full meals/feasts), there should be one cup, one container of liquid that all partake from, representing the blood of Christ, and the one loaf, that we all take from representing the Lord's body and the body of believers, with Christ as our head (Colossians 1.18). Our communion at the beginning of every week, should be marked by a meal, as the early church did (Acts 2.42; 1 Corinthians 11.21, 33) to show our unity, and the emblems to show Christ's death, and our unity in the body of Christ.

Conclusion

Now that we've looked at the fact that the organized church with all its trappings is of "man" and not God, are you willing to abandon these traditions? Or will you continue practising what you know to be contrary with the Word of God?

Are you going to ignore what you now know, or will you be faithful to what you have learned? Or will you continue to promote your religious inventions above the inspired Word of God?

Will you step out of the institutional church that embraces practices that go against the New Testament or will you "make void the commandment of God on account of your traditional teaching." Matthew 15.6

History shows that where conscience and tradition collide, most of God's people go with tradition.

The question before us is. . .

What will **we** do?